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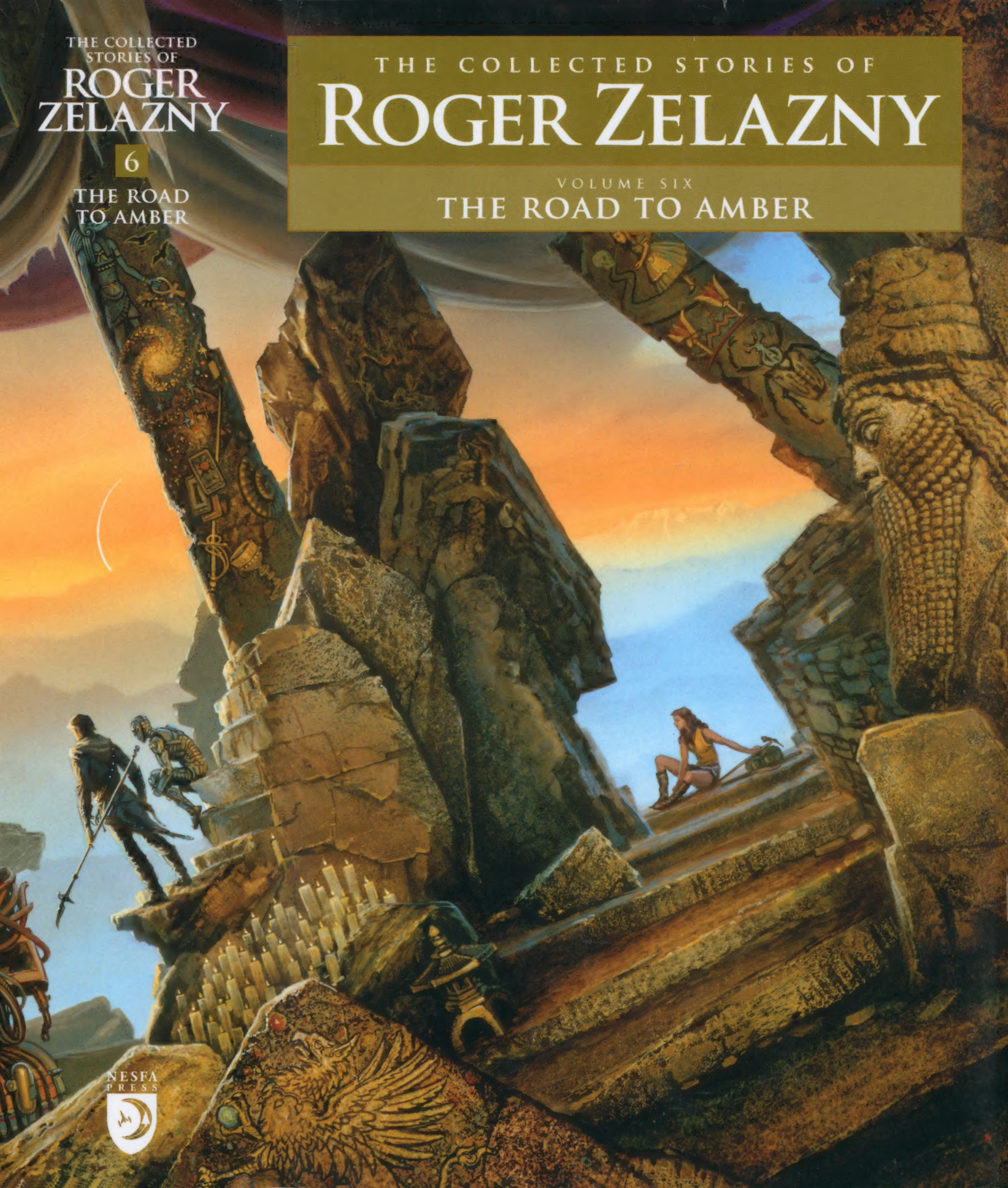

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF

ROGER ZELAZNY

VOLUME SIX

THE ROAD TO AMBER

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF
ROGER ZELAZNY
6
THE ROAD TO AMBER

NESFA PRESS

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THE COLLECTED STORIES OF
ROGER ZELAZNY

VOLUME 6: THE ROAD TO AMBER

Roger Zelazny wrote with a lyrical quality rarely found in science fiction—creating rousing adventures, intricate "what-if?" stories, clever situations, and sweeping vistas in which to play them out. Leavened with layers of allusion and imagery, his diverse writing styles and breadth of subject matter brought him praise as a prose poet and a Renaissance man. Zelazny's vivid stories, especially his spectacular novellas, are classics in the field.

Although he is best known for his 10-volume Amber series, his early novels *Lord of Light* and *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, and the Dilvish series, his shorter works contain his best writing.

In this six-volume collection you'll find every one of Zelazny's short works, plus a selection of essays, novel excerpts, and other interesting items from his widely varied writing career.

The stories in this series are enriched by Zelazny's own words, taken from his many essays, describing why he wrote the stories and what he thought about them in retrospect. Many of the stories are followed by notes explaining his allusions, turns of phrase, historical references, and unusual word choices.

Here in volume 6, the last in the series, Zelazny displays a variety of styles and interests in "Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love," "Epithalamium," "Lady of Steel," "The Three Descents of Jeremy Baker," and four outlines for projects never completed.

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6

THE ROAD
TO AMBER

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THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROGER ZELAZNY

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VOLUME 2: Power & Light

VOLUME 3: This Mortal Mountain

VOLUME 4: Last Exit to Babylon

VOLUME 5: Nine Black Doves

VOLUME 6: The Road to Amber

BIBLIOGRAPHY: The Ides of Octember

THE ROAD TO AMBER

VOLUME 6:

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF

ROGER ZELAZNY

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2009

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A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

This six volume collection includes all of Zelazny's known short fiction and poetry, three excerpts of important novels, a selection of non-fiction essays, and a few curiosities.

Many of the stories and poems are followed by "A Word from Zelazny" in which the author muses about the preceding work. Many of the works are also followed by a set of "Notes"[1] explaining names, literary allusions and less familiar words. Though you will certainly enjoy Zelazny's work without the notes, they may provide even a knowledgeable reader with some insight into the levels of meaning in Zelazny's writing.

> "My intent has long been to write stories that can be read in many ways from the simple to the complex. I feel that they must be enjoyable simply as stories…even for one who can't catch any of the allusions."
>
> —Roger Zelazny in *Roger Zelazny* by Jane M. Lindskold

The small print under each title displays original publication information (date and source) for published pieces and (sometimes a guess at) the date it was written for unpublished pieces. The small print may also contain a co-author's name, alternate titles for the work, and awards it received. Stories considered part of a series are noted by a § and a series or character name.

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[1] The notes are a work in progress. Please let us know of any overlooked references or allusions, or definitions you may disagree with, for a possible future revision.

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THE ROAD TO AMBER

VOLUME 6:

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF

ROGER ZELAZNY

ROGER ZELAZNY

by Jane Lindskold

He drank his coffee black. So did I. Sometimes we'd drink out of the same cup, because it was easier than keeping two mugs filled. But that was later…

By the time I met Roger Zelazny in 1989, he had long given up smoking cigarettes. I never even saw Roger smoke a pipe. He quit smoking after something like twenty-four years, because he thought even pipe smoking was interfering with his martial arts.

Sometimes Roger would have a beer or a glass of wine with a meal, a nip of Scotch or brandy with friends, but I never saw him even tipsy. So "my" version of Roger Zelazny is quite different from the younger man described by old friends in many of the earlier introductions.

There's another way "my" Roger was different from the one described elsewhere. The Roger I knew was rarely quiet. He laughed a lot, sang small snatches of nonsense songs, hummed. He didn't just talk, he burbled.

But let me take a step back and write myself into the story, because our stories intertwine fairly tightly, even from our first contact.

It's 1988, and I'm in a bookstore in New York: Queens, I think, but I'm not sure. On the shelf I see a Choose Your Own Adventure book based on Zelazny's Amber series. I'd been a Zelazny reader since high school, probably even before.

Of Zelazny's work, I'd especially enjoyed the Amber novels. In college, my good friend Kathy Curran turned me onto a bunch more of Zelazny's other works. When, in 1985, *Trumps of Doom*, the first of the second series of Amber novels came out, I was in grad school at Fordham University. Kathy called and said, "He's started them again." She didn't need to say who or what. I knew.

My response was less than flattering to a writer whose works I sincerely enjoyed.

"Oh. I probably won't read them until he's done. I've looked at the copyright dates for the first series. Did you know there were something like eight years between the first and last novels? I'll just wait."

But I didn't. A couple of years later, I was set to go camping with a bunch of friends from college. Various things, including a too large campfire (my fault) and a shortage of campsites, led to us spending the weekend at the cottage where Kathy Curran, now a graduate biology student, was then living.

At Kathy's house, I came across some of those "new" Amber novels. I ended up giving into temptation and reading them. I had mixed reactions to Merlin and to Zelazny's changed conception of Amber, but overall I was intrigued.

So, back to that bookstore in Queens where I stand, holding a copy of a Choose Your Own Adventure book set in Amber. At that time, I was finishing up my Ph.D. in English at Fordham. I'd wanted to write fiction for a long time, but I knew nothing about the business, and what I did know was completely wrong. That's probably a good thing, because if I'd known even a little more, I never would have written to Mr. Zelazny.

But I did, because seeing that Choose Your Own Adventure novel, I figured that Zelazny had lost interest in Amber. Surely he never would have permitted these simplistic game books to be done if he hadn't lost interest. (Shows what I knew. Roger always loved experimenting with different forms of telling a story.)

But if Zelazny had lost interest in Amber, I was still deeply interested. I had an idea for a novel that would not in any way violate the "canonical" material. In my ignorance, I decided to ask Mr. Zelazny for permission to write that book.

This was sometime in 1988, in the days before the internet made contacting an author almost too easy. I wrote Mr. Zelazny care of his publisher. I included a self-addressed stamped envelope for his reply. After a few weeks of tantalizing hope that I'd hear back, I figured it wouldn't happen. I went back to working on my dissertation or the classes I was teaching. Then, in July of 1988, to my astonishment, a postcard depicting the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe showed up. It was from Roger Zelazny himself.

The note was short, written in very tiny handwriting, and politely declined my offer. Nonetheless, I was tremendously excited. I decided to write a thank you for his courtesy in replying. Again, I wrote care of the publisher, again including a self-addressed stamped envelope. The second postcard came from Paris.

So began a correspondence that now crowds several file drawers. I asked questions. Always, Mr. Zelazny, gradually becoming "Roger" in my mind, would write back. Eventually, he told me to use his home address and to please stop including a self-addressed stamped envelope, since we were now "acquainted."

We met for the first time in 1989, at Lunacon in Tarrytown, New York. It was also my first SF convention. I'd finished my Ph.D. by then, and, in fact, was leaving that Sunday for Lynchburg College in Virginia for a job interview.

I almost didn't go to Lunacon. I'd written Roger, asking if I could introduce myself. No response came. I decided I'd overstepped. By then, though, my buddies were interested in going to the con. I figured I'd go, then watch and listen to Mr. Zelazny's presentations from a distance.

Then, just a few days before Lunacon, a battered and tattered packet arrived from the Postal Service. Inside was a nearly shredded note from Roger Zelazny saying I absolutely should introduce myself if I did make it to Lunacon.

There something unbelievable happened. I certainly wouldn't believe it if I hadn't been there. We said hello, shook hands, and some connection beyond the logical happened. We were instant best friends.

"Love" is probably too strong a word to use, but, yes, it was there from that moment. We fell in love.

Of course, such things don't happen, not between a twenty-six-year-old, newly minted Ph.D. and a famous author twice her age. I didn't know Roger, so I didn't know he was notoriously shy. Otherwise, I probably would have wondered about his ulterior motives in inviting me to a party his agent was throwing that night—and, yes, he included my then-husband in the invitation.

But I was awed and excited, and I went (with my now-ex). And Roger and I talked a considerable amount, especially given that he was not only Guest of Honor of the convention but also of this party. The next day I came back to Lunacon and went to Roger's Q&A. I was still very shy of him, but I wanted to get a book signed for Kathy Curran, so I steeled myself and joined the line.

To my surprise, Roger not only signed the book (a used paperback; I was *very* broke) but asked if I wanted to chat. We found a place in a hallway where there were two tall-backed chairs. I think because no one expected to find Roger there, we actually talked for quite a while without interruption. But, eventually, other members of the convention noticed the anomaly. I finally excused myself and found my friends.

The next day I didn't come back. But from that point something changed in our correspondence. For one, Roger's next letter ran just over three single-spaced typewritten pages. Up until then, the longest letter had been one page. He was more personal, more chatty. The letter itself was written over the course of two days, as if he hadn't wanted to stop the conversation.

After that, the frequency of letters increased: sometimes short notes, sometimes longer, chattier missives. Often they were written serial fashion, covering several days. At Lunacon, I'd admitted my own interest in writing fiction. Roger already knew about my academic writing. Now we began to discuss the craft more often and in more detail.

Roger didn't so much try to tutor me as to show me what the life of a working writer was like—what he was writing, when invitations to participate in projects came in, what he was reading, about judging a contest, about a review that had just come in of *Blood of Amber*.

He liked to mention the weather, part of a lively connection with his surroundings, the same that had shaped his novella "24 Views of Mount Fuji, by Hokusai." He loved lilacs, jazz music, sweets.

When *Knight of Shadows* (the fourth book in the new Amber series I wasn't going to read until it was done) was near release in 1989, Roger sent me an advance review copy. By the time *Prince of Chaos* was released in 1991, it was dedicated to me.

Yet, despite the fabric of words that connected us on a daily basis, Roger and I met only rarely. I was teaching college in Virginia. He was writing books and stories in New Mexico. I was married. He was married and had three kids he loved dearly. We never said anything to do with an "us." Or at least not for a long time as such things go. That wasn't the point. We had each found a soul-mate, someone to talk to.

What did we talk about? Everything. One thing the introductions I've read so far don't touch on is how much Roger was fascinated by just about every aspect of the world. He never worked on a computer, but he read about computer science as well as other sciences, hard and soft. He read poetry daily, even though he didn't write as much of it as he once had. He loved history and biography. He read mythology, theology, psychology, and philosophy—and didn't draw tight lines between them. He loved writing as a craft and would read occasional "how to" books to keep up on the jargon. He also was fascinated by the business side of the field.

Unlike far too many professionals of high reputation, Roger never stopped reading the newer writers. He didn't just read the hotshots being nominated for awards. He read novels because a splashy cover caught his eye or because a title amused him.

As our correspondence progressed, Roger sent me books—often by the box-load. We were generations apart, so some of what had formed him was out of print or unavailable to me. He'd hunt out a copy of an old favorite and send it along. Or he'd finish a book of essays on some subject, then send it so we could "talk" about it. Or sometimes, as with *Expecting Someone Taller* by Tom Holt or Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, a book would make him laugh, and he'd send a copy of that, too.

This exchange wasn't one-sided. I didn't send as many books, but, if I mentioned liking something, he'd read it. He sent me jazz and copies of the tapes his sons made for him. I sent him David Bowie albums. We had a great time.

In 1990, I saw a short notice in *Locus* that Twayne's American Author series was looking for writers to do books on various SF/F authors. Roger's name was on the list. After a lot of consideration, because I was really worried the casual nature of our correspondence would change, I asked Roger if I could do the book and quote from some of our letters. He agreed. Far from the biography changing our relationship for the worse, it intensified it.

Let me shift back to the general here. Having known the man in his diversity, far too much of what is written about Roger stresses his intellectual side, his place in the SF/F field as one of the New Wave writers who improved the form, as a distant, even god-like figure.

Roger never thought he'd introduced anything remarkable, knowing full-well that literary tricks which were new to SF/F were old hat in the larger writing world. Yes, he loved writing and tried to be innovative and interesting, but that was where it stopped. He knew where he was special and knew also that many of the things for which he was praised were not the reason.

There's another side to this poetry-reading intellectual, a side that Roger never attempted to hide, but many chose to ignore because it did not fit the image. His reading could be distinctly low-brow. He liked the Destroyer novels—and read each as it came out with enthusiasm. He read action adventure novels by authors such as John D. MacDonald and Donald Hamilton. He read a fair amount of what might be termed "modern noir" detective fiction.

Roger also liked comics and sent me copies of some of his favorites. We heatedly discussed how *Grimjack* might work out. As *Sandman* became more popular, sometimes one or the other of us would have trouble finding copies of the latest issue, so we fell into the habit of buying each other copies and mailing them back and forth. But he also liked Donald Duck, especially Uncle Scrooge. He liked broad, bad humor and limericks.

Another important element of Roger's life became apparent as we corresponded. Roger loved his three kids. Hardly a letter would go by without a passing mention of one or the other. Sometimes it was just that he was back from dropping someone at school. Sometimes it was going to a soccer game or some other school event. Often it would include what kid's friend was sleeping over that night.

A great deal has been said about how Roger's productivity slowed in the eighties, and how maybe some of what he wrote then wasn't as good or ambitious as his earlier works had been. This is one of those blanket statements which should be made with care.

The novel *Eye of Cat*, which is very ambitious and stylistically creative, was published in 1982. The novella "24 Views of Mount Fuji, by Hokusai," which, by Roger's own admission in the story's introduction in the collection *Frost & Fire* was written in part in an effort to stretch his own limits, was published in 1985. It won a Hugo. The Hugo Award-winning novella "Permafrost" was published in 1986.

Yet Roger did have a new, complex, creative endeavor to occupy him during this "slower" time, an endeavor that influenced his interests as well as his writing. Their names are Devin, Trent, and Shannon, his three children, born 1971, 1976, and 1979.

Roger wrote a lot of sword and sorcery during the years his kids were young. However, sword and sorcery—and Burroughs's Tarzan books, which he told me he had read to Trent—and other such works were what had hooked Roger on the field as a child. Is it a coincidence that Roger's writing became more experimental once again as his kids began to get older and might understand those experiments?

I don't think so. Nor do I think Roger regretted anything he wrote during that time.

After all, Roger was diverse. He would read Proust and follow it up with Calvin and Hobbes. He loved Amber so much he named his corporation after it. He returned to sword and sorcery characters like Shadowjack and Dilvish the Damned for several projects. He loved those "lighter works" as much as he loved *Lord of Light* or *Creatures of Light and Darkness* or the novellas that brought him more critical acclaim. They were all part of him, even if fans and critics wanted to have him write solely one thing or another.

Okay. Back to those intertwined lives. Time passed. By the mid-nineties my marriage to my college beau began to fragment and then to break.

On the day I decided that I was going to leave that marriage at the end of my current teaching contact, find work elsewhere, start a new life, I called Roger to tell him. After all, he was my best friend. Hard as it may be to believe, we'd never discussed getting together permanently. We both believed firmly in commitments, and we both had them.

So I was shocked when Roger asked me to move out to New Mexico to be with him, "Because I realize I don't want you going anywhere else."

I thought about staying solo—after all, I was pretty burnt on relationships by then. I realized I didn't want to just run and hide if Roger was willing to take a chance. So I agreed. I'd sold a few—four, I think—novels by then, although, due to quirks of publishing, none were yet out. I had a few short stories published. Hardly much on which to base a career, but at least I had a track record.

We started making plans for my move. I even considered giving notice at my job earlier than planned. Then Roger called to tell me he had just learned he had cancer. He offered me an out. I told him he was crazy, that if he was sick, I needed to be there.

But we delayed my arrival until the end of the term. This gave Roger time to start chemo, to inform his family of changes to come, to deal with a lot of things that arise at such times. We talked daily. We still wrote letters, pretty much daily. And June of 1994 came, and I went south.

Roger met me in North Carolina. We drove west in my sedan with my six cats. He'd always been thin, but I was shocked at how much weight he'd lost since I'd last seen him. I'd brought a bunch of recorded books and old radio dramas, but we didn't listen to a single one. We talked steadily for days. We'd keep talking for the next eleven months and a bit.

I'm not sure what we talked about. The same old stuff, I guess: history, biography, mythology, theology, science, poetry, our lives together and apart, and writing, always writing. Roger read me the Bunnicula books while I did cross-stitch beadwork. I introduced him to role-playing games. We both wrote.

I taught him how to make crepes. He insisted on learning how to flip them, rather than turning them with a spatula. We bought a guinea pig. She had babies. Roger was thrilled and insisted we keep all three. When Roger was strong enough, we went touring locally. We went to conventions. We went to New Zealand.

Somewhere in there, the chemo stopped working. I was at his side when Roger stopped breathing. And stopped talking. And was finally quiet.

Except that Roger's stories are still there making beautiful noise. Those stories are all his—the silly ones and the serious ones, the poetic and the crass, the science fiction and the fantasy. Altogether they are a complex body of work that, when taken in total, come close to reflecting a complex and fascinating man.

—Jane Lindskold

REMEMBERING ROGER

by Gerald Hausman

When Roger and I were collaborating on the novel *Wilderness*, he would have dinner at our home and secretly sign several of his books in my living room bookshelf—never more than a couple at a time—and always leave a little message for me to find at some later date. Just the other day I found one of these with Roger's tight, neat script adorning the title page. He'd written: "Finally finished the one I told you about."

There were many Rogers—but the one I began to know best was the elusive Roger. The one who left messages in books like messages in bottles, little threads that were tied to conversations. These were not inscriptions but rather encryptions, and Roger expected me to remember as much as he did. He remembered everything: names, dates, people, plots. A mathematical mind in the soul of a mage.

In each of these small inscriptions I found some earthly or ethereal wisdom, an epiphany that uplifted me for days, weeks or months. Roger was instinctive about the needs of his friends, and he lavished this largesse of love, giving each and every one of us, his friends and extended family, something that we needed.

For one man who played musical instruments in a band, Roger told all of his friends about this musical buddy, and, more importantly, he was there in the flesh to applaud when his friend performed. He met folksinger and sci-fi writer Will Sundown Sanders at a city coffeehouse where Will was playing, and Roger made sure all of his other friends knew about Will, his riffs, and his writing.

In my case, Roger was clear and definite. "You need an agent," he said one day, and he found me one. Shortly thereafter, I found myself with a top flight editor, a major publisher, and a contract—all of which might not have happened without Roger's help. He also wrote a comment for my new book, comparing me to Carlos Castaneda and Philip K. Dick. Over the top, but what the heck…friends.

When I thanked him for all of his help, Roger said, "All you need now is a notebook to put down your expenses and a Tax Pac to file your receipts, the rest will take care of itself."

Another time he gave me some future advice—"From one family man to another, write one book for each of your children."

"Why?" I asked.

"For the sake of legacy, for what you leave behind, write one book for each child. So, for me, a book each for Devin, Trent, Shannon. That should cover their needs…afterwards."

I thought it was an odd thing to think about at a time when I was just getting started, but then I didn't know that our time was growing short. Roger had the keen eyes of a hawk—he could see things that were not yet, things forthcoming. Much later, I realized that Roger meant more than "just a book"—he meant, in effect, write a "big" book for each of your children.

Once Roger had a dream, and he told me it was a plot outline for a book that he wasn't going to write.

"Why not?"

"Well," he answered, "I saw you as the author. This is your book, I'm giving you the outline." I guess he wanted me to move along in the bestseller business. I was writing books, one after another, but they were more poetry books, children's titles, and academic texts.

Roger's dream novel seemed a bit hazy to me, as it involved James Bond, Dr. No, a bizarre murder, various timescapes and reality warps, and all of it set on the island of Jamaica in the late 1960s. He was quite specific about these things as he dictated the summary, and I wrote it down over the phone.

"So who's the main character?" I queried when he was done.

Chuckling, he said—"You. But in the novel you're an old man, a bookish old stickfighter from the hills of the North Coast."

That summer, while working in Jamaica, I discovered that there were still a few ancient cudgelists—stickfighters—on the island. This nearly unknown martial art goes back to the days of Robin Hood. I sketched the outline Roger dictated and put it in my desk drawer where it still resides more than fifteen years later, untouched.

Am I waiting for a sign from Roger? Or just afraid that without him the novel won't be what he wanted me to write?

Roger taught me so many things, but perhaps the greatest gift of all was his ability to give someone a book that cut to the very core of their thinking.

There are three books that come to my mind, books that changed my life. These, more than any others, inspired me to write specific books of my own that, miraculously, many years after publication are still in print. All part of Roger's great and generous plan.

Roger's kindness really had no boundary. Once, when I was struggling to make ends meet, he gave me his unused, early model Apple computer that was still in the box it came in and with it a month's rent, and he told me, "Help another writer when you're able to. Pass it along." He was the original believer of forwarding goodness. You could say he invented "the writer's guild of guided saints." And, if, in fact, writers have such providers, Roger is still moving manuscripts along, lifting them out from under the piles on editors' desks, and letting them see the light of day.

Curiously, he once said he had actually done this, metaphysically, of course.

"How?" I asked him.

"With intention," he replied.

I have talked to more than a dozen writers whose careers were boosted or even charmed by Roger, and each one of these people speaks in the same manner in which I'm writing, with a measure of awe, love, and wonder.

I don't want to forget the three arcane books that Roger gave me, for they are a pivotal part of this friendship story.

Black Gods, Green Islands by Geoffrey Holder with Tom Harshman.

Peter Whiffle: His Life and Works by Carl Van Vechten.

Griffin & Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence by Nick Bantock.

Indeed, these are as special to me as they were to Roger. The first two nearly forgotten as literary art, the third, a classic in its genre—and who knows what that genre is, exactly. Roger liked all three and gifted them to me.

Black Gods, Green Islands, if you don't know it, is a return to the Garden of Eden, the garden of evil. I had an awakening when I read it—so this is how you merge mythology and fantastic fiction. The book was just what I was looking for. And it taught me how to utilize my Caribbean experiences and shape them into a book of my own. The book was almost a how-to on the art of doing this. Thus I did *Duppy Talk: West Indian Tales of Mystery and Magic,* which was used by the History Channel in their series *Haunted Caribbean.*

The Life and Times of Peter Whiffle amused me, fascinated me. I remember Roger saying that he read it aloud to his family. "We've had a lot of fun with this story," he said. I drank in the Whiffle tale and saw that it was full of Rogerisms.

Roger loved the Whiffly picaresque voice of Van Vechten. I did, too, and especially when I saw that some of Van Vechten's wisps of historical narrative resurfaced in one or two of the Amber novels.

In *Griffin & Sabine,* Roger's fascination with telepathy, letters, islands (of the mind as well as geography) is abundantly and pleasurably clear. This was the book he inscribed to my wife Lorry, for whom he also brought a scone each morning when he brought his children to Santa Fe Prep School. Lorry worked in the front office of Prep, and she would look up and see Roger, gift scone in hand, smiling. So *Griffin & Sabine* was for both of us, Lorry and me. Not surprisingly, this book would inspire a number of collaborative story collections that Lorry and I wrote and compiled during the 1990s. Somehow, I think, Roger effected a kind of alchemy, and it all started with the gift of this book *Griffin & Sabine.* Roger wrote in Lorry's copy—"They don't write them like this very often." By which he meant not at all.

I once asked him how he did it, how he made so much invention so down-to-earth real. He tapped his forehead, "Right here," he said in his deceptively simple way. I was reminded of that the other day when I saw this Bob Marley quote: "I live in my head."

Roger was "miracle cat" as one of his books intimates. I saw him practice his martial art skills at our dinner table one time—pinning my hand like a butterfly with his two fingers. And this when he was sick from cancer but still strong as a bull. That one move of his sent me to a master with whom I studied for years, never achieving Roger's catlike grace, but learning how to stand, how to sit, and curiously, how to hold a pen.

In addition to all his other gifts, Roger was a voracious reader, devouring some seven or eight books each week. I joined him in that rapacious pursuit for a while. But I couldn't keep up. It doesn't matter; he taught me to read fast and well and to zero in on the thing or things I was looking for. Book done, you move on. William Saroyan also read like this, calling it "reading around." Roger's pursuit was more fox and hound. Harrying not hurrying. Before I met Roger, it took me months to read a single book. Roger suggested I throw away my reading glasses—but that is another story.

In writing this, I am suddenly reminded that I have left out the last and most eccentric of Roger's gift books. How did I miss *The Pink Motel* by Carol Ryrie Brink? Roger presented this skinny little novella to me one day. The novel's not that good, as Roger himself confessed, but he knew I would find a message within the hard boards of the book and left it at that.

The Pink Hotel had a further effect on my psyche, and it went beyond the borderland of writing. Sometime after I read it, we moved to Florida. This little tale that Roger put in my hand was a roadmap to the sandspur back woods of Southwest Florida where an old saltwater collection of oddly painted cabins loomed in my future.

Dreams of conch shell pink.

I'm still here, writing amidst the herons and eagles.

And as I think of Roger's legacy and the books of his that have altered my life, I wonder if he—if anyone—can be summed up in this casual, reminiscent way.

If so—Roger loved books, exotica, ideas, food. (reverse the order)

Above all, Roger loved people. (reverse the order again)

—Gerald Hausman
Bokeelia, Florida

THE TRICKSTER

by Gardner Dozois

It was difficult to follow the science fiction genre in the late '60s without becoming aware of Roger Zelazny. Unlike his great contemporary Samuel R. Delany, whose early novels (published with maximum obscurity as bottom-of-the-line pulp paperbacks) I had been following for several years before he even published his first short story, Zelazny was at the beginning of his career almost entirely known for his short fiction. I still associate him with the colorful covers of magazines such as *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Worlds of If*, and *Fantastic*—magazines which, if you look at old copies today, give off when handled that unique pulp-magazine smell that for an old-time fan can instantly evoke sense-impressions of exactly where you were and what you were doing when you bought them. I dimly remember (this was forty-seven years ago, after all, while I was still in high school, so give me a break!) that I had run across a few stories by Zelazny in 1962 in *Fantastic* or *Amazing* (I was a loyal reader of Cele Goldsmith's *Fantastic* in particular, mostly for Fritz Leiber's "Gray Mouser" stories, so it's quite likely), perhaps "Horseman!" or "Passion Play." To tell the truth, they hadn't impressed me much.

All that was to change, for me and for everyone else, with the publication of Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" in the November 1963 *F&SF*. I remember standing in front of the newsstand shelf in *Eaton's Drugstore* in Salem, Massachusetts, listening to the metallic clanking and whirring of the milk-shake machine (except that we called them frappes in New England in those days) and staring at the lovely wrap-around cover by Hannes Bok, which I believe was the only wrap-around cover I'd ever seen. It was the exotic evocativeness of the Bok cover that hooked me and drew me in (although, truth be told, I'd have bought the magazine anyway, no matter what the cover was), but back in my room I soon found that the story inside the covers was equally exotic and evocative, with a lyricism, fluidity, and playfulness of language that was rare in the SF of the day and which was to become one of Zelazny's trademarks.

Here, in the words of the hoary old cliché, was a writer to watch—and even as a grotty high-school kid, I knew it as soon as I put the magazine down.

By the time I began trying to sell my own early stories, it had become nearly impossible not to have heard of Roger Zelazny, who seemed to be everywhere with amazing stories, and whose name was on everyone's lips—although in those days almost nobody knew how to pronounce it.

By the time I actually met Roger Zelazny, I had progressed to being a very small-time neo-pro with three or four sales under my belt. I think it was in 1970, probably at a Disclave in Washington, D.C., possibly at a Balticon in Baltimore, Maryland. I was in a crowded room party when I became aware of a tall, thin man sitting quietly by himself in one corner of the room. "That's Roger Zelazny," somebody whispered in a hushed voice. I was too shy to actually approach him, but I watched him for a while. Although he spoke very little, his hands were constantly busy making intricate cat's-cradles with string. When he finished a particularly complex one, he would raise it up to show it to someone, and his solemn face would break suddenly into a delighted smile, a smile of childlike pleasure that transformed his entire countenance. After you watched him for a while, you realized that, although he was very quiet, he was not isolated or detached from the party taking place around him, was in fact intently aware of everything. His eyes missed nothing.

At some point that weekend, I did actually meet Roger. I was relieved to find that he was warm and friendly in his quiet way with a surprising and mischievous sense of humor bubbling just below the surface, ready to lance out at lightning speed when he saw the opportunity to make a humorous remark. In fact, as I came to know him, the main impression I got of Roger, belying his somber appearance, was of a sweet and rather pixilated *silliness*. He was silly in the same way that Monty Python was silly, with a cockeyed surrealism that was rarely mean-spirited but which demonstrated an amused and benignly screwball way of looking at the world. I suspect that to a certain extent Roger saw the world as a game to be played with high spirits and great good cheer or perhaps a puzzle to be solved with quiet competency and calm enjoyment. Those qualities pervaded his fiction as well.

Like a number of other writers, Roger Zelazny began publishing in 1962 in the pages of Cele Goldsmith's *Amazing*. This was the so-called "Class of '62," whose membership also included Thomas M. Disch, Keith Laumer, and Ursula K. Le Guin. Everyone in that "class" would eventually achieve prominence, some faster than others. Zelazny's career would be one of the most meteoric in SF history. The first Zelazny story to attract wide notice was "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," later selected by vote of the SFWA membership to have been one of the best SF stories of all time. By the end of that decade, he had won two Nebula Awards and two Hugo Awards (Nebulas for "He Who Shapes" and "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," Hugos for the magazine serial *...And Call Me Conrad* [later published unabridged as *This Immortal*] and *Lord of Light*). He was widely regarded as one of the two most important American SF writers of the '60s (the other was Samuel R. Delany).

Zelazny's early novels were, on the whole, well-received (the first half of *This Immortal*, before the giant armadillos and giant bats and giant dogs come out, is excellent), but it was the strong and stylish short work he published in magazines like *F&SF* and *Amazing* and *Worlds of If* in the decade's middle years that electrified the genre. These early stories—stories like "This Moment of the Storm," "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," "The Graveyard Heart," "He Who Shapes," "The Keys to December," "For a Breath I Tarry," and "This Mortal Mountain"—established Zelazny as a giant of the field, and many still consider them his best work. These stories are still amazing for their invention, elegance and verve, for their good-natured effrontery and easy ostentation, for the risks Zelazny took in pursuit of eloquence without ruffling a hair, for the grace and nerve he displayed as he switched from high-flown pseudo-Spenserian to wisecracking Chandlerian slang to vivid prose-poetry to Hemingwayesque starkness in the course of only a few lines—and for the way he made it all look easy and effortless, the same kind of illusion Fred Astaire generated when he danced.

After a string of weak SF books in the '70s, the critics, whose darling he had always been, turned sharply on Zelazny, although he remained popular with the readership. By the end of the '70s, although his critical acceptance as an important science fiction writer had dimmed, his series of novels about the enchanted land of Amber—beginning with *Nine Princes in Amber*—had made him one of the most popular and best-selling fantasy writers of our time, inspiring the founding of fan clubs and fanzines world-wide. And it is as a fantasy writer that posterity will probably judge him.

Zelazny's approach to fantasy was similar to the brisk, wisecracking, anachronistic slant of the de Camp & Pratt "Harold Shea" stories such as *The Incomplete Enchanter*, but in a somewhat different key, with less emphasis on whimsy (very few authors with the exception of de Camp & Pratt, T. H. White, and Lewis Carroll were ever really able to use whimsy successfully) and more emphasis on action and on dramatic and often quite theatrical showdowns between immensely powerful adversaries. The Zelazny hero (often fundamentally the same person, whether he was called Corwin or Conrad or Sam) faces his supernatural foes with genial good sense, unperturbed calm, and self-deprecating humor, always quick with a quip or a wry witticism. Although the Zelazny hero almost always possesses immense power and resources (which must help to maintain your *sang-froid* when confronting fearsome demons and monsters), he frequently defeats his enemies by outwitting them rather than by using physical might or magical potency. In fact, the typical Zelazny hero, in both fantasy and science fiction, is a benign and genial version of the Trickster, a wry, pipe-smoking Coyote, who, although sometimes scared or bewildered, is usually several moves ahead of his opponents all the way to the end of the game.

The Amber series, of course, is probably Zelazny's most important sustained contribution to fantasy. It's worth noticing that the first few volumes of the series were published as science fiction novels by an established science fiction line, but by the time of Zelazny's death, the Amber books were categorized as fantasy. Amber's storyline would occasionally touch bases with our modern-day Earth or employ some high-tech gadget, as though Zelazny was deliberately trying to muddy the waters. Perhaps he was, as there are fantasy elements in almost all of his "science fiction" books and science fictional elements in almost all of his "fantasy" books. It's difficult to believe that these weren't deliberate aesthetic choices. Zelazny's other fantasy series, launched before the Amber books, the adventures of Dilvish, the Damned (collected in *Dilvish, the Damned* and a novel *The Changing Land*), is unambiguously Swords & Sorcery. Perhaps as a result, the Dilvish sequence is considerably less interesting and successful. Zelazny himself seemed to lose interest in it for long stretches of time, producing only a few stories in the sequence throughout the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. Zelazny's most popular, successful, and influential singleton novel, *Lord of Light*, although also ostensibly science fiction, functions as well as fantasy as it does as SF; in fact, the book probably makes more logical sense as a fantasy than it does as a plausible science fiction scenario. I can't help but wonder if it is an example of an author disguising a fantasy book as science fiction to make it saleable under the market conditions of the time. Again, this may be just another example of Zelazny with his Trickster hat on, deliberately blurring the borderlines between the two genres, perhaps smiling at the thought of some future critic trying to sort things out.[1]

Zelazny won another Nebula and another Hugo Award in 1976 for his novella "Home Is the Hangman," another Hugo in 1982 for "Unicorn Variation," another Hugo in 1986 for his novella "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai," and a final Hugo in 1987 for his story "Permafrost." In addition to the multi-volume Amber series, and the titles already mentioned, his other books include the novels *The Dream Master, Creatures of Light and Darkness, Isle of the Dead, Jack of Shadows, Damnation Alley, Eye of Cat, Doorways in the Sand, Today We Choose Faces, Bridge of Ashes, To Die in Italbar*, and *Roadmarks*, and the collections *Four for Tomorrow, The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth and Other Stories, The Last Defender of Camelot, Unicorn Variations*, and *Frost & Fire*. Among his last works are his last solo novel, the Nebula-nominated *A Night in the Lonesome October*, and three collaborative novels, *Psychoshop*, with the late Alfred Bester, *A Farce to Be Reckoned With*, with the late Robert Sheckley, and *Wilderness*, a mainstream "Western" with Gerald Hausman, and, as editor, four anthologies, *Wheel of Fortune, Warriors of Blood and Dream, Forever After*, and *The Williamson Effect*. Zelazny died in 1995. A noir mystery, *The Dead Man's Brother*, was published posthumously in 2009.

Unlike many of the people who wrote essays for these volumes, I can't claim to have been a close personal friend of Roger's. We didn't see each other often even when he lived in Baltimore, and once he moved to New Mexico, on the other side of the continent, we saw each other even less. We said hello and exchanged a few words at convention room parties, occasionally had drinks at a convention bar along with other writers and fans, once or twice had dinner together, and that was largely it. A few images observed at a little closer range stick in my mind, though, and may give you the flavor of the man. One was the infamous Knob Dinner already described by Kristine Kathryn Rusch in volume 2 of this series. Another was during the early mid-'70s, during a week-long writer's workshop we called the Guilford Gafia (on the model of the Milford Mafia, *bête noire* of conservative SF writers and critics), held by Jack C. ("Jay") Haldeman in his big, rambling, somewhat rundown wooden house in the Guilford section of Baltimore. Jay's brother Joe Haldeman, Jack Dann, George Alec Effinger, myself, and others came in for these marathon critique sessions. Roger was never part of the formal workshop itself, but in those days he still lived in Baltimore, only a few blocks away, and every once in a while, when the manuscripts were put away and the wine came out, he'd come over and party with us.

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[1] Zelazny deliberately blurred the line between sf and fantasy, especially in *Lord of Light*. See "...And Call Me Roger" part 2 (in volume 2 of this collection). He also talked about mixing sf and fantasy in the Amber series (see "...And Call Me Roger" in volumes 2 and 3).

One night we hit the wine bottles particularly hard and began to play an all-night game of poker with a pornographic deck of cards that Ron Bounds had brought back from Germany. They featured a busty blond lady having sex with a rather bemused-looking German Shepherd. Somebody (possibly me) mentioned how the Futurians probably would have taken this opportunity to write a novel during the all-night poker game, using the "hot typewriter" method pioneered by Fred Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, where one author would write until he got tired, and another would jump in to spell him and keep writing. Of course, we had to do the same thing. A typewriter was broken out, and, taking turns during the poker game, we began to write a pornographic novel to be called either *The Trouble With Smegma* or *Naked Came the Android* (there was some argument on this point), following the model of the then-bestselling round-robin novel *Naked Came the Stranger*. Ultimately, we produced only twenty or thirty pages, and, perhaps fortunately for all concerned, the manuscript has long since been lost. Interestingly, considering the talking dog in *The Dream Master*, Roger's section concerned a woman having sex with just such a dog, perhaps unsurprisingly considering the cards we were playing with, a German Shepherd. The two lovers throw themselves suicidally from a window, only to be rescued on the following page by the next writer to sit down at the typewriter. I don't think I ever saw Roger happier than while writing this piffle. Roger's usual grin was a shy, almost sly one, flashing out for only a second, but he wore his grin for most of that night and kept collapsing in laughter at silly things that he himself or other people wrote. There could be no doubt that he was having *fun*. The next day, a bit hung over, he told us sheepishly that his wife had given him hell for wasting all that time writing crap that he was never going to be able to sell—but I think that he found doing so something of a relief, writing for once without worrying about the salability of what he was producing.

One of the last times I ever saw Roger for any extended period of time was after the 1981 Worldcon in Denver, Colorado. My wife, young son and I and a few friends traveled by car from Denver to Santa Fe for a few days of post-convention vacation. A group of us, including George R. R. Martin, went to visit Roger in his house in Santa Fe (where he gave us a tour of his office and told us slyly that he'd like to win a Gandalf Award *and* a Balrog Award, so that he could have them fighting each other on an office shelf). Afterward, we went with the Zelaznys and their young children to watch the Zozobra Festival, a totally artificial "folk" ritual, thought up by cultural anthropologists, where a giant puppet of Old Man Gloom is set on fire and burns to ash, taking all the troubles and misfortune of the old year with it.

Roger sat on the ground, arms wrapped around his long legs, watching all this intently. There came that delighted, childlike grin again, the grin of a man who saw the essential absurdity of the world and celebrated it because it *was* absurd, a benign Trickster who, like Corwin or Sam, showed only those cards to the others in the game that he cared to show, but who played the game with élan and panache and enjoyed it thoroughly until the very moment when the time came to cash in his chips.

—Gardner Dozois

STORIES

GODSON

Black Thorn, White Rose, eds. Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, Eos 1994.

The first time I saw Morris Leatham, at the baptismal font where he became my godfather, I was too small for the memory to stick. Thereafter he visited me every year on my birthday, and this year was no exception.

"Morrie," I said, knuckling my right eye and then my left. I opened them and stared through the predawn light of my bedroom to the chair beside the window with the dead geranium on the sill, where he sat, tall and thin, almost anorectic-looking.

He rose, smiling, and crossed to the side of the bed. He extended a hand, drew me to my feet, and passed me my robe. "Put it on," he said, as he led me out of the room. My Aunt Rose and Uncle Matt were still asleep. Moments later, it seemed, Morrie and I were walking inside the local mall. It was dimly lit, and there was no one about.

"What are we doing here?" I asked.

"I'd like you to walk through, look around, and tell me what you'd like for a birthday present."

"I know right where it is," I said. "Come on."

I led him past the bench where the night watchman lay unmoving, a wet spot at the crotch of his uniform trousers. I stopped before a store window and pointed.

"Which one?" Morrie asked.

"The black one," I said.

He chuckled.

"One black bicycle for David," he said. "I'll get you one like that, only better. It'll be delivered later today."

"Thank you," I said, turning and hugging him. Then, "Don't you think we ought to wake that guard up? His boss might come by."

"He's been dead for some time, David. Myocardial infarct. Died in his sleep."

"Oh."

"That's how most people say they'd like to go, so he had it good," Morrie told me. "Just turned seventy-three last month. His boss thought he was younger. Name's William Strayleigh—'Bill,' to his friends."

"Gee, you know a lot of people."

"You meet everybody in my line of work."

I wasn't sure what Morrie's line of work was, exactly, but I nodded as if I were.

I woke up again later and cleaned up and dressed and went downstairs for breakfast. There was a birthday card beside my plate, and I opened it and read it and said, "Thanks, Aunt Rose."

"Just wanted you to know we hadn't forgotten," she said.

"My godfather Morrie remembered, too. He was by earlier, and he took me to the mall to pick out a present and—"

She glanced at the clock.

"The mall doesn't open for another half hour."

"I know," I said. "But he got me in anyway. Too bad about the night watchman, though. Died in his sleep on a bench. I'm getting a black ten-speed that'll be sent over this afternoon."

"Don't start on that business again, David. You know it bothers Uncle Matt."

"Just wanted you to know the bike was coming."

"Nobody's been here this morning. Nobody's been out and back in. You miss your folks. It's natural you have these dreams around your birthday."

"And I get presents."

"Hard for us to know, since you weren't with us last year."

"Well, it's true. Morrie always gives me something. Dad could have told you."

"Maybe," she said. "But it's strange that Morris has never gotten in touch with us."

"He travels a lot."

She turned away, began making French toast.

"Just don't mention him around Matt."

"Why not?"

"Because I asked you not to, okay?"

I nodded when she glanced my way.

The doorbell rang that afternoon, and when I opened the door it was there: a bike with a paint job so dark and shiny that it looked like a series of black mirrors. I couldn't find a manufacturer's name on it, just a silver-edged plate on the handlebar post in the shape of a small black heart. The note tied to the bar said, "Happy Birthday, David. His name is Dorel. Treat him well and he will serve you well.—M."

It was a long time before I knew exactly what that meant. But the first thing I did, of course—after removing the tag and handing it to Uncle Matt—was to take it down the steps, mount, and ride off.

"Dorel," I said softly. "He told me you're called Dorel." Was it my imagination, or did a brief vibration pass through that midnight frame just then?

Everything Morrie gave me had a special character to it—like the Magic Kit I had gotten last year, with the Indian Rope Trick I never used (I'm not a good climber) and the Five-Minute Time Warp which I never found any use for. I keep it in my pocket.

"My name's David," I continued. "You're beautiful and you're fast and you're easy to steer. I like you a lot."

It was as if I were going downhill all the way to the corner and back.

When I parked Dorel on the porch again, Uncle Matt was waiting right inside the door. "I just heard on the news," he said, "that the night watchman at the mall was found dead this morning, of a heart attack."

"I know," I said. "I told Aunt Rose about it earlier."

"How did you know about it?"

"I was there, before the mall opened, with Morrie. He got us in, and I picked out the kind of bike I wanted."

"How did he get you in?"

"Uh, I don't really remember the details."

Uncle Matt scratched his chin through his beard and narrowed his gray eyes behind his thick glasses. They looked a lot like my eyes, and—I suddenly remembered—my dad's.

"What's he look like, anyway—your godfather?" he asked.

I shrugged. It was hard to remember just what he looked like. "Kind of thin. He has dark hair, I think. And a real nice voice. Makes you want to do whatever he says."

"That's all?"

"I guess so."

"Damn! That's no description, David. That could be almost anybody."

"I'm sorry."

He reached out and squeezed my shoulder as I began to draw back.

"I didn't mean to yell at you," he said. "It's just that the whole business is kind of—unusual. Not to speak ill of my own brother, but it's no secret that your father was a heavy drinker. Especially there at the end. It's why your mother left him. Probably what killed him, too."

I nodded. I'd heard—or overheard—all this before.

"He told a bizarre story of the way he met your godfather. Sounded like something a paranoid Trotskyite drunk might come up with, and I didn't believe a word of it. Still don't."

I stared at him. I knew what a paranoid was, also. And two out of three wasn't bad.

"I don't remember the story," I said, "if I ever knew."

Uncle Matt sighed, and told me the tale.

My father met Morrie at a crossroads, pursuant to a dream. He'd dreamed that a voice came to him out of a thundercloud limned with lightning, and it said, "I am God. You have alienated everyone close to you and I pity you. I shall stand for your son in my own church and make him happy in life."

My father said, "You give to the rich and leave the poor working stiffs to hunger. I do not want you for my son's godfather." And there was a clap of thunder and the cloud went away, and the earth split and a flame rose up out of the crack and a voice spoke from it, saying, "I am Satan. Have me. I will make him rich. I will see that he gets on well in the world."

My father said, "You are the Prince of Bullshitters. I do not want you either, for I do not trust you." And fire flared, and Satan was gone, also. Later then he was halfway to wakefulness, a shadowy figure passed near and told him, "When you awaken walk outside. Stop at the first crossroads you come to. I will meet you there."

"Who are you?" my father asked. "I am he who makes all equal," came the reply, "in a most democratic fashion." And my father got up, dressed, went out into the darkness, and waited at the crossroads. There he met Morris, and he invited him to be my godfather, for he said that one who had him for a friend would lack nothing.

"Do you know what that means?" Uncle Matt asked me.

"Yeah. It's a good thing that he went to the crossroads, or I wouldn't have my bike."

He stared at me for several moments. "Rose and I weren't present at your christening. We'd had a disagreement with Sam earlier. So neither of us got to meet Morris."

"I know."

"The next time you see him, tell him it had nothing to do with him, or with you. Tell him we wish he'd stop by sometime."

"You will get to see him," I told him. "He says everyone does. I'll ask him to name a date next time—"

"Never mind," he said, suddenly.

Later, that evening, after my birthday party, I went out on my new bike again. Lacking an address for a thank-you note, I resolved to go visit Morrie and say it aloud. In the past, when I'd wanted to see him between birthdays I would wander about trying to figure out how to do it and before long I always encountered him—most recently as part of the crowd at an auto accident, and once at the beach, where I was watching the guard give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a guy. This time, though, I'd go in style.

I pedaled hard till I got to the outskirts of town, coasted downhill to a wooded area, turned onto an old logging road now mainly used by hunters, fishermen, hikers, and kids from the high school following dances and movies. It was darker down here than it was up on the hill, and I bore to the left, coming onto a long, winding stretch under summer foliage.

"Dorel," I said, "I'm really happy with you, and I want to go and thank Morrie for such a great birthday present. I don't know where to find him but I've got a feeling you do. I'd like you to help me get to him—now."

A throbbing seemed to begin within the dark vehicle, and as we rounded the next corner a kind of stroboscopic effect began. At first it seemed that it might simply have been from the angle of the light and the trees' spacing. But after a while each period of darkness seemed more intense, lasted a little longer; and each time the light returned it came more dimly, came for a shorter bit of time.

Soon, I coasted down a dark tunnel—for I noted that I need no longer pedal but only steer in the direction of a distant light which now came into view. Dorel vibrated, and we picked up speed. After a time, the light grew brighter and I entered a gallery of stalactites and still pools. The place was a blaze of light, for there were candles everywhere I looked on every ledge, in every niche, atop every flat surface. They varied in size, they burned with a still intensity. There were no drafts here, save for the rush of air from my own passage, and we were slowing, slowing… I put my foot down, halted, and stared. I had never seen so many candles before in my life.

"Thanks, Dorel," I whispered.

I set the kickstand and walked about. There were tunnels leading off in all directions from the grotto, all of them blazing for as far as

I could see with multitudes of candles. Every now and then a burnt-down candle stub would glitter and go out. Shadows darted about these like black butterflies as they died.

Wandering, I was suddenly concerned about finding my way back out. I halted and looked about for Dorel. Once I was back upon my bike, I was sure I could retrace my route.

A shadow glided around boulder, plinth, stalactite. It was my bike, with my godfather seated upon it and pedaling slowly, grinning. He wore what appeared to be a dark cloak. He waved and made his way in my direction.

"How good of you to come and visit," he called out.

"Wanted to say thanks for the present," I told him. "Dorel's really neat."

"Glad you like him." He drew up before me, braked, and dismounted, setting the stand.

"I never knew a bike to have a name before."

He ran a bony finger along the handlebars.

"He is something that owes me a great debt. He is paying it off in this fashion," he said. "Would you care for a cup of tea or hot chocolate?"

"I'd like a hot chocolate," I said.

He led me around a corner and into a niche where a slab of stone bore a red-and-white calico tablecloth. Two cups and saucers were laid upon it, along with napkins and spoons. Sounds of classical music were in the air, and I could not determine their source. We seated ourselves and he reached for a carafe which stood within a wire frame above one of the ubiquitous candles. Raising it, he filled our cups.

"What is that music?" I asked.

"Schubert's Quartet in D Minor, a favorite piece of mine," he said. "Marshmallow?"

"Yes, please."

He added marshmallows. It was hard to see his face, the way the shadows danced about him.

"Is this where you work, Morrie, or where you live?"

He handed me my cup, leaned back, and commenced cracking his knuckles, one by one, a talent I mightily envied him.

"I do a lot of my work in the field," he said. "But you might consider this my office, and I do keep an apartment here. Yes, it is both."

"I see," I said. "It's certainly well lit."

He chuckled. He gestured broadly, and the nearby flames flickered wildly.

"She'll think it a fainting spell," he remarked.

"Who?" I asked.

"The lady who belongs to that candle. Name's Luisa Trujillo. She's forty-eight years old and lives in New York City. She's got another twenty-eight years to go. *Bueno*."

I lowered my cup, turned slowly, and regarded the immense cavern and all of the side chambers and tunnels.

"Yes," he said after a time. "All there, all of them. There's one for each of them."

"I read that there are several billion people in the world."

He nodded.

"Lot of wax," he observed.

"Good chocolate," I said.

"Thanks. The Big Ten's really come upon bad days."

"Huh?"

"Everything interesting's happening in the West," he said.

"Oh," I said. "Football. You're talking college football, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I like pro football, too. What about you?"

"I don't know enough about it," I said, "but I'd like to," and he commenced telling me.

Much later, we simply sat, watching the candles flicker. At length, he refilled our cups.

"You given any thought to what you want to be when you grow up?" he asked.

"Not really," I said.

"Consider being a physician. You'd have a knack for it. I'd see to that," he said. "Do you play chess?"

"No."

"Good game, too. You ought to learn. I've a mind to teach you."

"All right."

I don't know how long we sat there, using the squares on the tablecloth for our board. The pieces were of bone—the clean white of fresh, the almost-brown of aged, bone—which were quite elegant. As we played, I realized that I liked the game.

"A physician," I remarked after a time.

"Yes, think about it."

"I will," I agreed.

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And so I did. It was good to have some sort of goal. I made it a point to study extra hard for math, chemistry, and biology classes. College wasn't particularly difficult, and while I worried as to where the money for med school would come from, a distant relative died at just the right time and left me enough to take care of it.

Even after I'd gone away to college I still rode Dorel—as sleek and shiny as ever—to Morrie's office every year on my birthday, where we drank hot chocolate, played chess, and talked football.

"You graduate in June," he remarked. "Then you do an internship and a residency."

"That's right."

"You've thought about the area in which you would like to specialize?"

"I was thinking of dermatology. I figure nobody will ever call me in the middle of the night with a dermatological emergency."

"Hm," Morrie said, stirring his chocolate with a delicate bone which served us as a spoon. "When I suggested the medical profession I had something a little more basic in mind. Internal medicine, perhaps."

A bat darted by, caught hold of Morrie's cloak, crawling inside, and hanging upside down from a seam. I took a sip of chocolate, moved my bishop.

"A lot of hard work there," I finally said. "Dermatologists make pretty good money."

"Bah!" Morrie said. He moved a knight. "Check," he added. "As an internist you will become the greatest consulting physician in the world."

"Really?" I asked, and I studied the chess pieces.

"Yes. You will manage some miraculous-seeming cures."

"Are you sure you've considered all the ramifications? If I get that good, I could be cutting into your business."

Morrie laughed. "There is a balance between life and death, and in this we play our parts. For mine, really, is the power over life, as yours will be the power over death. Think of it as a family business."

"All right. I'll give it a shot," I said. "By the way, I resign. You've got me in four moves."

"Three."

"Whatever you say. And thanks for the present, those diagnostic tools. I've never seen anything like them."

"I'm sure they'll come in handy. Happy Birthday," he said.

* * *

And so I went off to a big hospital in a big city in the Northwest, to do my time. I saw Morrie more than ever there. Usually, he'd stop by when I was on the night shift.

"Hi, Dave. That one in Number Seven. She'll be checking out at 3:12 A.M.," he said, seating himself beside me. "Too bad about the fellow in Number Sixteen."

"Ah, he was fading fast. We knew it was just a matter of time."

"You could have saved that one, Dave."

"We tried everything we knew."

He nodded. "Guess you're going to have to learn a few more things, then."

"If you're teaching, I'll take notes," I said.

"Not yet, but soon," he responded. He reached out and touched my cup of coffee, which had long ago gone cold. It began to steam again. He rose and faced the window. "About time," he said, and a moment later there came the blaring of a horn from the highway below, followed by the sound of a collision. "I'm needed," he said. "Good night." And he was gone.

He did not mention it again for a long while, and I almost thought he had forgotten. Then, one day the following spring—a sunny and deliciously balmy occasion—I went walking in the park. Suddenly, it seemed that I cast two shadows. Then one of them spoke to me:

"Lovely day, eh, Dave?"

I looked about. "Morrie, you're very quiet when you come up on a person."

"Indeed," he said.

"You're dressed awfully solemnly for such a fine, bright morning."

"Working clothes," he said.

"That's why you're carrying a long, sharp tool?"

"Right."

We walked in silence for a time, passing through a field and into a grove of trees. Abruptly, he dropped to his knees at the foot of a small rise, extended his hands amid grasses, and spread them. Two small flowering plants lay between his extended forefingers and thumbs. No, what had seemed a pair of plants could now be seen as but one. What had misled me was that it bore both blue and yellow flowers. I regarded the leaves. I recalled a botany class I had once taken…

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"Yes, study it," he said.

"I can't identify it," I told him.

"I would be most surprised if you could. It is quite rare, and the only sure way to know it and to find it when you need it is by means of introduction and by words of summoning, which I shall teach you."

"I see."

"And in your case it will be necessary to place samples under cultivation in your apartment. For you must learn its usages more deeply than any other who knows of it. Roots, leaves, stalks, flowers: each part has a separate virtue, and they can be made to work in a wide variety of combinations."

"I do not understand. I've spent all this time getting a first-rate medical education. Now you want me to become an herbalist?"

He laughed.

"No, of course not. You need your techniques as well as your credentials. I am not asking you to abandon the methods you have learned for helping people, but merely to add another for…special cases."

"Involving that little flower?"

"Exactly."

"What is it called?"

"Bleafage. You won't find it in any herbal or botany text. Come here and let me introduce you and teach you the words. Then you will remove it and take it to your home, to cultivate and become totally familiar with."

I ate, drank, and even slept with the bleafage. Morrie stopped by periodically and instructed me in its use. I learned to make tinctures, poultices, salves, plasters, pills, wines, oils, liniments, syrups, douches, enemas, electuaries, and fomentations of every part and combination of parts of the thing. I even learned how to smoke it. Finally, I began taking a little of it to work with me every now and then and tried it on a number of serious cases, always with remarkable results.

My next birthday, Morrie took me to a restaurant in town, and afterward an elevator in the parking garage seemed to keep descending, finally releasing us in his office.

"Neat trick, that," I said.

I followed him along a bright, winding tunnel, his invisible servants moving about us, lighting fresh candles and removing the remains of those which had expired. At one point, he stopped and removed a stump of a candle from a case, lit it from the guttering flame of one upon a ledge, and replaced the old one with the new one, just as the former went out.

"What did you just do, Morrie?" I asked. "I've never seen you replace one before."

"I don't do it often," he answered. "But that woman you fed the bleafage to this afternoon—the one in 465—she's just rallied." He measured the candle stump between thumb and forefinger. "Six years, eight months, three days, seven hours, fourteen minutes, twenty-three seconds," he observed. "That's how much life you have bought her."

"Oh," I said, trying to study his face and failing, within the darting shadows.

"I'm not angry, if that's what you're looking for," he said. "You must try the bleafage out if you're to understand its power."

"Tell me," I said, "is it a power over life or a power over death that we are discussing?"

"That's droll," he said. "Is it one of those Zen things? I rather like it."

"No, it was a serious question."

"Well, mine is a power over life," he said, "and vice versa. We're sort of 'yin-yang' that way."

"But you're not restricted to your specialty, not when you have this bleafage business going for you, too."

"David, I can't use the herb. I can only teach you about it. I require a human master of bleafage to use it for me."

"Oh, I see."

"Not entirely, I'm certain. Go ahead and experiment. It may seem that the people you treat with it all come to you by chance, but this will not always be the case."

I nodded and studied the flowers.

"You have a question?" he asked.

"Yes. That candle stub you used for purposes of extending Mrs. Emerson, of Room 465, for six years, plus—How did it come to be snuffed out at just that point, rather than having burned itself all the way down? It's almost as if you'd—snuffed someone prematurely."

"It is, isn't it?" he said, grinning broadly. "As I mentioned, death *is* a power over life. Let's have some coffee and our brandy now, shall we?"

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I was more than a little puzzled by the way Morrie ran his business. But it was his show and he'd always been kind to me. He'd given me a whole new wardrobe for a birthday present, and when I completed my residency he gave me a new car. Dorel was still in fine fettle, but I needed a car once I began my practice. I moved Dorel to the rear of the garage and rode him only on the weekends. But I found myself going out there more and more, evenings, sitting on the high stool beside the workbench, popping the tab on a cold one and talking to my bike the way I had when I was a kid.

"Funny," I said, "that *he* should give me a wonder drug for saving lives. On the other hand," I reflected, "it's obvious that he did sort of push me into medicine. Could it be that he wants control over the life-*giving* half of the yin-yang? Not just letting someone live, but assuring quality time by removing causes of suffering?"

Dorel's frame creaked as he leaned slightly in my direction. His headlight blinked on, blinked off.

"Is that an affirmative?" I asked.

The blinking was repeated.

"Okay, I'll take that as 'yes,' " I said, "and two for 'no.' "

One blink followed.

"It would make a kind of sense," I said, "for two reasons: First, back when I was still at the hospital, I gave a sample of bleafage to Dr. Kaufman, a biochemist, and asked him whether he could determine its major constituents. He died in the lab the next day, and a fire destroyed whatever he was working on. Later, I ran into Morrie in the morgue, and he told me that synthesizing bleafage was a no-no. He did not want it to become as common as aspirin or antibiotics. That would make it seem he only wanted certain persons to benefit.

"Second," I continued, "I believe this guess was confirmed by the instructions he gave me when I set up in private practice."

Morrie told me that I would get calls from all over for consultations. He never said where they'd get my name or number or why they'd want me, but he was right. They did start coming in. He told me to take my bleafage with me whenever I went, and my special diagnostic tools, but that the entire diagnosis and treatment—or lack of it—would be governed solely by a matter of personal perception. I can see Morrie when other people can't. He said that in those special cases where I'm called in to consult he would enter the room. If he were to stand at the head of the bed, I was to diagnose and treat, and the patient would live. But if he stood at the foot, I was to perform a few routine tests and pronounce it a hopeless case.

"It almost seems as if there were an agenda, as if he had a special deal with some of my patients or a plan into which they fit."

The light blinked once.

"Ah, you think so, too! Do you know what it is?"

It blinked twice, then a third time.

"Yes and no? You have some guesses, but you're not sure?"

It blinked once.

"Of course, no matter what the reasons, I'm helping a lot of people who wouldn't be helped otherwise."

A single blink.

"Morrie once said that you're working off a debt by being a bicycle."

A single blink.

"I didn't understand what he meant then, and I still don't. Is there a way you could tell me?"

Again, a single blink.

"Well, what is it?"

Abruptly, Dorel rolled across the garage, leaned against the wall, and grew still and lightless. I gathered that meant that I had to figure it out for myself. I tried, too, but was interrupted by a phone call. Emergency. Not at the hospital, but one of those special emergency cases.

"This is Dr. Puleo, Dan Puleo. We met at that ER seminar this spring."

"I remember," I said.

"Speaking of emergencies…"

"You got one?"

"There's a limousine on the way to pick you up."

"To take me where?"

"The governor's mansion."

"This involves Caisson himself?"

"Yes."

"How come he's not in the hospital?"

"He will be, but you're near and I think you can beat the ambulance."

"I think I can beat the limo, too," I said, "if I take the bike trail through the park."

I hung up, snatched my med kit, ran back to the garage.

"We've got to get to the governor's mansion fast," I said to Dorel as I wheeled him out and mounted.

What followed was a blur. I remember dismounting and making my way shakily to the door. Somehow I was inside then, shaking hands with Puleo and being escorted into a bedroom as the doctor said something about a bad bout of flu recently, kidney stones last year, and no history of heart problems. No vital signs at the moment either.

I stared at the figure on the bed—Lou Caisson, a reform governor who was doing a great job on a number of fronts his predecessor had let slide, as well as maintaining the previous administration's gains. All that, and having an attractive, talented daughter like Elizabeth, as well. I had not seen her since we'd broken up back in school and headed for different parts of the country. As I moved forward to begin my examination, I felt a guilty pang. I had let Morrie break us up, with his insistence that I attend a West Coast med school after I'd been accepted at the one with the Eastern university she was to attend.

Speaking of Morrie…

A shadow slid forward and Morrie stood at the foot of the bed. He was shaking his head.

I checked for a carotid pulse. There was none. I raised an eyelid…

Suddenly, I was mad. As I heard the sirens in the distance, I was swept by a wave of anger over every decision in my life that Morrie had influenced. In an instant looking back, I saw just how manipulated I had been with all his little bribes and attentions. I opened my med kit and placed it on the bed.

"Are you going to treat him?" Puleo asked.

I leaned forward, slid my arms beneath Caisson, picked him up. I backed away then, walked around the foot of the bed behind Morrie, and laid him back down again, this time with Morrie standing at his head. I reached across and picked up my kit.

"I can't take any responsibility—" Puleo began.

I filled the long syringe.

"If I treat him right now, he'll live," I said. "If I don't, he'll die. It's as simple as that."

I unbuttoned Caisson's pajama top and opened it.

"David, don't do it!" Morrie said.

I did it—3 cc's of tincture of bleafage, intracardially. I heard the ambulance pull up out front.

When I straightened, Morrie was glaring at me. He turned away then and walked out of the room without even bothering to use the door. I heard Caisson gasp. When I checked his carotid again the pulse was present. A moment later he opened his eyes. I put my kit away and buttoned his shirt.

"You'll be all right," I said to him.

"What course of treatment is indicated now?" Puleo asked.

"Put him in the ICU and watch him for twenty-four hours. If he's okay after that, you can do whatever you want with him."

"What about continuing medication?"

"Negative," I said. "Excuse me. I have to go now."

When I turned away she was standing there.

"Hi, Betty," I said.

"David," she said, "is he going to be all right?"

"Yes." I paused, then, "How've you been?"

"Oh, pretty well."

I started toward the door, then stopped.

"Could we talk for a minute, in private?" I asked.

She led me to a little sitting room, where we sat.

"I wanted you to know I've been missing you for a long time," I said, "and I'm sorry about the way I broke up with you. I suppose you've got a boyfriend now?"

"I take it that means you're unencumbered yourself?"

"That's right."

"And if I am, too?"

"I'd like to go out with you again. Get to know you again. Is there any possibility? Might you be interested?"

"I could tell you that I'm going to have to think about it. But that wouldn't be true. I have thought about it, and the answer is yes, I will go out with *you*."

When I reached out and squeezed her hand, she returned the pressure. We sat and talked for the next two hours and made a date to go out the next night.

Riding back through the park in the dark, I switched on Dorel's headlight and was reminded of our earlier "conversation."

"Talk! Damn you!" I said. "I want your opinion!"

"All right."

"What?"

"I said, 'All right.' What do you want to know?"

"How come you wouldn't talk to me earlier?"

"I could only talk if you ordered me to. This is the first time you have."

"What are you—really?"

"I was a physician he'd trained in early nineteenth-century Virginia. Name's Don Laurel. I did something he didn't like. Manufactured and sold a patent medicine—Laurel's Bleafage Tonic."

"Must have helped some people he didn't want helped."

"Aye, and maybe a few horses, too."

"I just saved someone he didn't want saved."

"I don't know what to tell you—except that I was arrogant and insolent when he confronted me concerning the medicine, and I wound up as transportation. You might want to try a different tack."

"Thanks," I said, plucking a quarter from under the headlight and flipping it. "Tails. I will."

Of course, Morrie came by later.

"Evening," I said. "Care for a cup of tea?"

"David, how could you?" he asked. "I've been good to you, haven't I? How could you go against my express wishes that way?"

"I'm sorry, Morrie," I said. "I did it because I felt sorry for the guy—starting off with such a great year in office, particularly those health care programs, putting all those fat-cat business interests in their place, and being taken out of the game so suddenly. And—well, I used to date his daughter. I still like her, as a matter of fact, and I felt sorry for her, too. That's why I did it."

He put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed it.

"David, you're a good-hearted boy," he said. "It's hard to fault a man for compassion, but in my line of work it can be a liability. You're going to have to be ruled by your head, not your heart, when you're working my cases, you understand?"

"Yes, Morrie."

"Okay, let's have that cup of tea and talk football."

Three days later I was doing some work around the house when the phone rang. I recognized the governor's voice immediately.

"How are you feeling, sir?" I asked.

"Fine, and I know I owe you a lot, but that's not why I'm calling," he said.

I knew it. Before he said another word, I could feel it coming: Morrie's revenge. My test.

"Emergency?" I said.

"That's right. It's Betty, and from what Puleo told me about my seizure this sounds like the same thing. He didn't say anything about its being contagious."

"I'll be right over."

"Should I call an ambulance?"

"No."

I hung up, got my kit, went for Dorel. As we headed through the park, I told him what had happened.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"You know what I'm going to do."

"I was afraid of that."

And so, as I checked her over, Morrie entered the room and stood at the foot of the bed. I drew 3 cc's into the syringe, then I turned her around.

"David, I forbid it," he said.

"Sorry, Morrie," I told him, and I administered the injection.

When she opened her eyes, I leaned down and kissed her, at about the same time that I felt Morrie's hand upon my shoulder. This time his grip was icy.

"Me, too," he said.

* * *

...And then we were walking in total silence through a dim place of constantly shifting shadows.

I seem to recall moving amid pieces of my world, in monochrome, as well as the way into his, down under the ground, of caves, tunnels, still pools. I knew we were arrived when we entered a tunnel lined with candles and followed it to that bright and massive central grotto where we had played so long at chess and drunk so much chocolate.

Passing through that vast gallery I seemed to acquire solidity once more. My footfalls created echoes. I felt again that cold grip which steered me. Some of the shadows fell aside, like drawn curtains.

Morrie took me through the grotto, up a corridor, then down a small, chilly tunnel off to its left which I had never visited before. I was too proud to ask him where we were headed and so be the first to speak.

At length, we halted, and he released my arm and gestured.

Jamming my cold hands into my pockets, I followed the gesture but could not at first tell what he was indicating, as we stood in a fairly average area of his office, ledges and niches full of candles. Then I saw that one of them was much lower than all of the others and was flickering now, preparatory to guttering. Assuming it to be Betty's, I waited to see it replaced by the action of one of the invisible entities.

"It was worth it," I said. "I love her, you know."

He turned and stared at me. Then he chuckled.

"Oh, no," he said. "You think that that's her candle? No. You don't understand. She'll live. You've seen to that. Her candle is already in good shape. This is *your* candle. You started out kind of handicapped in that regard. Sorry."

I withdrew a hand from my pocket, reached out, touched it gently.

"You mean that's all I have? Maybe a few minutes? And you didn't mess with it because you're mad at me? That's *really* the way it is?"

"That's right," he said.

I licked my lips.

"Any—uh—chance of an—extension?" I asked.

"When you've crossed my will a second time, after I'd warned you?"

"I didn't do it lightly," I said. "I told you I'd known Betty years ago, and I cared about her then. I didn't realize how much until just recently, when it was almost too late. There was no real choice then. I had to save her. Perhaps such emotions are something you cannot quite understand—"

He laughed again.

"Of course I can understand caring about something," he said. "Why do you think I'd decided to take Governor Caisson right when I did? The son of a bitch's business policies had just cost the town a pro football franchise—for my favorite team. And I'd been angling to get them here for over a generation."

"So you *were* grabbing him off early?"

"You bet I was. Then you had to butt in for the first time in your life."

"I begin to understand… Say, Morrie, you know it's not too late to transfer my flame to a fresh candle."

"True," he acknowledged, "and you are my *godson*. That still counts for something."

He stared a moment longer at the candle.

"Probably should," he said. "Shouldn't stay mad forever. Family counts for something…" and he stooped and reached into an opened case back in a recess in the wall.

Drawing forth a candle, he stood and reached forward with his other hand toward my sputtering taper. He touched it, began to raise it. Then I saw it slip from his fingers and plunge groundwards.

"Shit!" I heard Morrie say as it fell. "Sorry, David—"

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Lying on the floor, watching a tiny spark, feeling that something had worked properly, not recalling what… And my cheekbone was sore where I'd hit it when I fell.

I lay amid countless lights. There were things I had to do, and do quickly. What were they?

I raised my head and looked about. Morrie was gone…

Ah, yes. Morrie, my godfather. Gone…

I placed my palms upon the floor and pushed myself up. Nobody there but me, a guttering candle, and a black bicycle. What was it I was supposed to remember? My mind felt heavy and slow.

"Get a candle out of the box, David! Hurry!" Dorel told me. "You've got to take the flame from the other before it dies again."

Dies again…

Then I remembered and shuddered. That's what I had done—died. And I would do it again and for keeps if I didn't act quickly. Fearing the worst, I had been able to buy this brief recurrence of the light, finally finding a use for the Five-Minute Time Warp I kept in my pocket. But how long it would last, lying there, sputtering, upon the floor, I could not tell.

I moved with accelerated deliberation—that is to say, as fast as I felt I could without disturbing the air to the point of ending the enterprise. It was just a piece of wick in an irregular puddle of wax now.

I groped in the carton, took out a candle, moved it to a position above the failing flame, held it there. For a second, the first one nearly died and my vision darkened and a numbness passed over me. But it caught, and these symptoms vanished. I turned it upright then and rose to my feet, groping once again in my pocket. I carried dried stems, flowers, roots, and leaves of bleafage wrapped in a handkerchief.

I placed the handkerchief on Dorel's seat and unfolded it.

"Good idea," he suggested as I began eating the specimens. "But as soon as you're finished I want to lead you to another tunnel where we can hide your candle amid many. We ought to hurry, though, in case he's still in the area."

I stuffed the last of the bleafage into my mouth and set off walking beside him, carrying my candle.

"Could you locate Betty's candle and hide it, too?" I asked.

"Given the time, the appropriate form, and the access," he said.

I followed him down another tunnel.

"I used to work here," he went on. "I was an invisible entity before he made me a bike. If I were an invisible entity here again I could keep moving your candle and Betty's so that he'd never know. I could correct any number of his petty abuses the way I used to. Might keep lighting you new ones, too, if you got into bleafage research."

"I could be persuaded," I said. "What would it take to make you an invisible entity again?"

"I'm not permitted to say."

"Even if I order you?"

"Even then. This is a different category of restriction. I can't think of a way to tell you how to get around this one."

We moved a little farther down the tunnel and he halted.

"To your left," he said, "in that low niche where several others are burning."

I dribbled a little wax to anchor it, set it upon that spot, held it in place till it was fixed.

"Mount," Dorel said then.

I climbed onto the seat, and we coasted through a series of chambers. Soon the stroboscopic effect began again.

"Back to where you were?" Dorel asked.

"Yes."

After a time, the upper world flashed into being for longer and longer intervals, as the underworld diminished.

Then we were slowing before the governor's mansion. Then we were halted there. I was dismounting. There was still some daylight, though the sun hovered just above the western horizon. As I was setting the kickstand, I heard the front door open.

"Dave!" she called.

I looked up, watched her approach down the stair. I realized again how lovely she was, how much I wanted to protect her. In a moment, she was in my arms.

"Dave, what happened? You just sort of faded away."

"My godfather, Morrie, took me. I'd done something he didn't like."

"Your godfather? You never mentioned him before. How could he do that?"

"He is a person of great power over life," I said, "who is responsible for whatever power I possess over death. Fortunately, he thinks I'm dead now. So I believe I'll have some reconstructive surgery, change the spelling of my name, grow a beard, move to another state, and run a small, low-key practice to cover the expense of my bleafage research. I love you. Will you marry me and come along?"

Dorel said, "I hate to tell you that you sound a little crazy, Dave, but you do."

She stared at my bike.

"Are you a ventriloquist, too?" she asked me.

"No, that was Dorel talking. He just saved my life. He's a rebel spirit doing time as a bicycle, and he's been with me since I was a kid. Saved my life a couple of times then, too." I reached out and patted his seat.

Descending the steps, she leaned forward and kissed the top of the handlebars.

"Thanks, Dorel," she said, "whatever you are."

Whatever he was, it was no longer a bicycle. He fell apart in the day's-end light into a swirling collection of golden motes. I watched, fascinated, as the phenomenon resolved itself into a tower about six feet in height, narrowing as it grew.

I heard Betty draw in a long breath.

"What did I just set off?" she asked.

"Beats me," I said. "But since there was no frog I don't think you get a prince."

"Guess I'm stuck with you then," she said, and we watched the bright whirlwind assemble itself into a human shape—that of a tall, bewhiskered man in buckskins.

He bowed to Betty.

"Don Laurel," he said. "At your service, ma'am."

Then he turned and shook my hand.

"Sorry to deprive you of transportation, Dave," he said. "But I just got my enchantment broken."

"Calls for a celebration," I said.

He shook his head.

"Now that I'm unbiked I have to find a niche quick," he said, "or, I'll fade to airy nothingness. So I'll be heading back below, and I'll take up residence in the caves. He'll never spot an extra invisible entity. And I'll keep moving both of your candles out of his way. Good luck with the bleafage work. I'll be in touch."

With that, he turned once more into a tower of light. The motes darted like fireflies and were gone.

"That's a relief," I said, moving once more to embrace her. "But I wish things had gone differently with Morrie. I like him. I'm going to miss him."

"He doesn't exactly sound like a nice guy," she observed.

"His line of work hardens him a bit," I explained. "He's actually quite sensitive."

"How can you tell?"

"He likes football and chess."

"They both represent violence—physical, and abstract."

"…And hot chocolate. And Schubert's Quartet in D Minor. And he does care about the balance between life and death, most of the time."

She shook her head.

"I know he's family," she said. "But he scares me."

"Well, we're going incognito now. He shan't be a problem."

I was able to leave it at that for a long time. Betty and I were married, and I did change my name and move to a small town in the South—though I opted against cosmetic surgery. The beard and tinted glasses and a different hairstyle altered my appearance considerably, or so I thought. I built up a satisfactory practice, had a greenhouse full of bleafage, and set up a small home laboratory. For over a year I managed not to be present at life-and-death crises, and when visiting my patients in hospital I was able to avoid other patients at terminal moments which might have resulted in an undesired family reunion.

You might say I was pathologically circumspect in this regard; even so, I did glimpse Morrie going around corners on a few occasions.

I kept wondering, though, given my line of work, when—not if—we would meet, and whether I would be able to carry the encounter with sufficient aplomb so as not to reveal that I possessed the ability to see him. When it did occur, of course, it was nowhere near the hospital, and I was not even thinking of these matters.

It was a Saturday evening in October and I heard the squeal of brakes followed by the sound of a heavy impact up the street from our home. I grabbed my bag and a flashlight and was out the door in moments. Betty followed me as I hurried to the corner where two cars had collided. Broken glass was everywhere and the smell of gasoline was strong.

Each vehicle had but a driver. One was obviously dead, and the other—a younger man—was badly injured, but still breathing.

"Go call 911!" I shouted to Betty as I moved to succor the second man. He had been thrown from the car and lay upon the pavement, a massive, well muscled individual with a bubbly pneumothorax, heavy arterial bleeding, numerous lesser lacerations, a possibly broken back, and fractured skull.

As I slapped a cover on the pneumothorax and moved to deal with the bleeding, a familiar figure was suddenly beside me. I forgot to pretend to be unseeing. In the press of the moment, I simply nodded, and said, "Can't argue with you about this one. Take him if you must."

"No," he said. "Save him for me, Dave. Shoot him up with bleafage. You've got all the time you need."

"What's so special about him, Morrie? I haven't forgotten how you treated me when I wanted to make an exception."

"All right. I'll forgive and forget if you'll do the same—and save this guy. My power, as I've often said, is not over death."

"Then how's about you promise to let me save whom I can, and do whatever I would with the bleafage?"

"Looks like you're doing that, anyway. But all right, I'll make it formal."

"I wish you could have been at my wedding, Morrie."

"I was there."

"You were? I didn't see you."

"I was in the back. I wore bright colors so you wouldn't notice."

"That guy in the Hawaiian shirt?"

"Yes, that was me."

"I'll be damned."

"And I sent you the microwave oven."

"There was no card with it."

"Well, we weren't talking."

"I did wonder about the Heat of Hell brand name. Good oven, though, I'll give you that. Thanks."

My patient moaned.

"About this guy, Morrie—Why are you so dead set against taking him?"

"You don't recognize him?"

"Too much blood on his face."

"That's the new quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons."

"No kidding. But what about the balance between life and death and all that?"

"They're really going to need him this season."

"I forgot you were a Falcons fan."

"The bleafage, boy, the bleafage."

And so…The Falcons are doing well this season, not the least because of their new quarterback. Not too many people die during Falcons' games, because Morrie comes by for beer and pizza and we watch them on the tube together. He collects with a vengeance afterward, though, if the Falcons don't do well. Read the obits.

Morrie hints strongly that he'd like to know what I did with the candles. But he can keep on wondering.

Don Laurel and I stay in touch. He comes by every Halloween for a glass of blood and we bring each other up to date on everything from bleafage to candles. And sometimes he changes into a bicycle for old times' sake, and we ride between the worlds.

This morning I walked back to the crossroads where the accident had occurred. Morrie was standing beside a lamppost petting a dead cat.

"Morning, Dave."

"Morning. You're up bright and early."

"Thought you might be coming by. When's she due?"

"In the spring."

"You really want me for godfather?"

"Can't think of anyone I'd rather have. Was that the same dream you sent my dad?"

"No. It's a remake. I updated it. Been watching some MTV."

"Kind of thought so. Care for a cup of coffee?"

"Don't mind if I do."

We walked home as the morning shadows fled. Whoever catches them may make himself a cloak of darkness.

Notes

It's probably coincidental that Zelazny featured Death / The Grim Reaper in two tales written near the end of his life—this one and the planned trilogy, *Donnerjack, of Virtù; The Gods of Virtù;* and *Virtù, Virtù.*[1] By all accounts, Zelazny was in good spirits and full of life during his last year. He rewrote "Godson" as a musical comedy. Just a few months before his death, Zelazny performed it solo (chanting, not singing) at a party hosted by George R. R. Martin.[2]

The fairy tale "Godfather Death," told by the Brothers Grimm and many others, forms this story's basis. The boy is the thirteenth son of a poor tailor, who cannot afford to raise him. The tailor seeks help from God and the Devil, but turns them down. He accepts Death because Death treats rich and poor alike. Death looks after the boy and helps him to become a great physician. Death gives him a magic healing herb and wants him to use it only if Death stands at the head of the bed. If Death stands at the foot, the patient must die. The Godson disobeys him once to save the King. Angry, Death warns him never to do it again. The Princess falls deathly ill; the Godson loves her and heals her with the herb. Death transports the Godson into a cave filled with millions of candles. "Each time a candle grows low and snuffs out, a life is ended. This sputtering one is yours." The Godson begs Death to light another candle for him, but the candle flickers out, and the Godson drops dead as the story ends.

A **Trotskyite** is a follower of Leon Trotsky who promoted Marxist theory and left-wing policies. **Limned** means outlined. **Stalactites** hang from the roof of a cavern. A **plinth** is a slab of rock. Schubert's **Quartet in D Minor** is an appropriate piece of music for Death. Written in 1824 by Franz Schubert just after he became aware of his ruined health, it is popularly called the *Death and the Maiden Quartet*. **Liniments** are medicinal fluids rubbed into the skin; **electuaries** are oral drugs prepared as a pasty mass with sugar and water or honey; **fomentations** are poultices. **Zen** Buddhism seeks enlightenment through meditation and by jarring the intellect with aphorisms such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" **Yin-yang** is the Chinese concept of dualistic forces in the universe. **Fettle** is condition.

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[1] *Roger Zelazny*, Jane M. Lindskold, 1993.

[2] *Locus*, Vol 35 No 2, August 1995.

GODSON:
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Written in 1994–95; previously unpublished.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MORRIS LEATHEM
DAVID WAYNE
ROSE MCCAULEY
MATT MCCAULEY
DOREL/DON LAUREL
DR. DAN PULEO
BETTY CAISSON
LOU CAISSON

ACT I

SCENE 1

David Wayne's bedroom. Pre-dawn light shines through the window. MORRIS LEATHEM sits on the chair beside the window. He is tall, thin. He wears black. He rises, smiling, and crosses to the side of the bed where DAVID, a 10-year-old boy, sleeps.

MORRIE

{SONG: MY GIVEN NAME IS DEATH}

He likes to call me Morrie, but my given name is Death.
I walk with everybody till their final breath.
I'm not a bad person, I have a job to do.
Ask me all about it when I come for you.

I haven't got much family so I'm new to all of this.
Being nice to people almost seems remiss.
But David is my godson and I've got to learn to care.
He gets special treatment just because he's there.

Walking down the street touching people that I meet
Who fall down at my feet, I do my work.
I turn them all to dust with my dark and icy touch
And I tip my hat and know that it was sweet.
For that is the way the world works, with passings and
failings and such.
I do my little part with my deft and certain art,
I'm even called a comfort to the pained.
They may look at me and cry when they know their time's
come by—
Yet not one of them has afterwards complained.
And that is the way the world works, with passings and
failings and such.
I turn them all to dust with my dark and icy touch—
And not one of them has afterwards complained.

He likes to call me Morrie 'cause he knows that we are kin.
But being nice to people almost seems a sin.
When he smiles at me I feel funny. He's warm and he
draws breath.
And I wonder as I stare at the boy who's sleeping there—
Could it be he loves me even though I'm Death?
Could it be he loves me, even though I'm Death?

DAVID awakens, as MORRIS helps him to his feet and hands him his robe.

MORRIE

Put it on.

He leads DAVID out of the room. Lights cross-fade, come up on other half of stage, revealing a dimly-lit, empty shopping mall.

DAVID

What are we doing here?

MORRIE

I'd like you to walk through, look around, and tell me what you'd like for a birthday present.

DAVID

I know right where it is! Come on!

DAVID leads MORRIE past a bench where a NIGHT WATCHMAN lies unmoving. DAVID stops before a store window displaying bicycles, and points.

MORRIE

Which one?

DAVID

The black one.

MORRIE

(chuckles)

One black bicycle for David. I'll get you one like that, only better. It'll be delivered later today.

DAVID

Thank you.

(hugs him)

Don't you think we ought to wake that guard up? His boss might come by.

MORRIE

He's been dead for some time, David. Myocardial infarct. Died in his sleep.

DAVID

Oh.

MORRIE

That's how most people say they'd like to go, so he had it good. Just turned 73 last month. His boss thought he was younger. Name's William Strayleigh—"Bill" to his friends.

DAVID

Gee, you know a lot of people.

MORRIE

You meet everybody in my line of work.

SCENE 2

Kitchen. AUNT ROSE is seated when DAVID, now dressed, enters and sits. He opens a card beside his plate and reads it.

DAVID

Thanks, Aunt Rose.

AUNT ROSE

Just wanted you to know we hadn't forgotten.

DAVID

My godfather Morrie remembered, too. He was by earlier, and he took me to the mall to pick out a present and—

AUNT ROSE

(glances at clock on wall)

The mall doesn't open for another half-hour.

DAVID

I know. But he got me in anyway. Too bad about the night watchman, though. Died in his sleep on a bench. I'm getting a black 10-speed that'll be sent over this afternoon.

AUNT ROSE

Don't start on that business again, David. You know it bothers Uncle Matt.

DAVID

Just wanted you to know the bike was coming.

AUNT ROSE

Nobody's been here this morning. Nobody's been out and back in. You miss your folks. It's natural you have these dreams around your birthday.

(rises to her feet)

AUNT ROSE

{SONG: WHY DO LITTLE BOYS LIE?}

Why do little boys lie?
Why do they love an untruth?
Why is a falsehood better than a truehood
On the lips of youth?

Why do little boys lie?
Why do they like spinning tales?
Why are they rappin' on things that never happen?
For it never fails—

They lie to you, they lie to you.
They look you in the eye and lie, lie, lie to you.
Is it mere imagination, a phase they're going through,
Where fantasy is just as true as life?
Or is it pure perversity, or rehearsal for adversity
Where lying *is* the way to ward off strife?
Oh, they put you through your paces
With the falsehoods that they say
But if they're learning social graces I guess that it's okay,
If they lie to you, they lie to you,
They look you in the eye and lie, lie, lie to you,
And they're learning social graces I guess that it's okay.
If they're learning social graces it's okay.

DAVID

And I get presents.

AUNT ROSE

Hard for us to know, since you weren't with us last year.

DAVID

Well, it's true. Morrie always gives me something. Dad could have told you.

AUNT ROSE

Maybe. But it's strange that Morris has never gotten in touch with us.

DAVID

He travels a lot.

AUNT ROSE

(Turns away, begins making French toast.)

Just don't mention him around Matt.

DAVID

Why not?

AUNT ROSE

Because I asked you not to, okay?

David nods. Lights fade, come up on living room/porch/yard. Doorbell rings. DAVID opens the door. A black bicycle stands on the porch. DAVID pulls off a note attached to the bar and reads it.

DAVID

"Happy Birthday, David. His name is Dorel. Treat him well and he will serve you well. —M."

DAVID hands the card to UNCLE MATT and tests the bicycle in the yard.

DAVID

Dorel. He told me you're called Dorel.

(The frame vibrates)

You're special. Like the magic kit I asked for last year, with the Indian Rope Trick I can't do. I'm not a good climber. And the Five-Minute Time Warp, I never found a use for that one either. But I keep it in my pocket. My name's

David. You're beautiful and you're fast and you're easy to steer. I like you a lot. Never heard of a CandlePower brand bike before, though.

He parks Dorel on the porch and goes in. UNCLE MATT is waiting for him. MATT has a beard and thick eyeglasses.

DAVID

It's great. I want to ride it a lot. I want to go show it to Betty!

UNCLE MATT

She that Councilman Caisson's daughter?

DAVID

Yeah. I'm going riding now—

UNCLE MATT

Wait! I just heard on the news that the night watchman at the mall was found dead this morning of a heart attack.

DAVID

I know. I told Aunt Rose about it earlier.

UNCLE MATT

Yes. How did you know?

DAVID

I was over there with Morrie before the mall opened. He got us in, and I picked out the kind of bike I wanted.

UNCLE MATT

How did he get you in?

DAVID

Uh, I don't really remember the details.

UNCLE MATT

(scratching his chin)

What's he look like, anyway—your godfather?

DAVID

(shrugging)

Kind of thin. He has dark hair, I think. And a real nice voice. Makes you want to do whatever he says.

UNCLE MATT

That's all?

DAVID

I guess so.

UNCLE MATT

Damn! That's no description, David. That could be lots of people.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

UNCLE MATT

(reaches out and squeezes DAVID's shoulder)

I didn't mean to yell at you. It's just that the whole business is kind of…unusual. Not to speak ill of my own brother, but it's no secret that your father was a heavy drinker. Especially there at the end. It's why your mother left him. Probably what killed him, too.

(DAVID nods)

He told a bizarre story of the way he met your godfather. Sounded like something a paranoid Trotskyite drunk might come up with, and I didn't believe a word of it. Still don't.

DAVID

I don't remember the story. If I ever knew it.

UNCLE MATT

Your father said he met Morrie at a crossroads, pursuant to a dream. He'd dreamed that a voice came to him out of a thundercloud limned with lightning and it said, "I am God. You have alienated everyone close to you and I pity you. I shall stand for your son in my own church and make him happy in life." Your father said, "You give to the rich and leave the poor working stiffs to hunger. I do not want you for my son's godfather." And there was a clap of thunder and the cloud went away, and the earth split and a flame rose up out of the crack and a voice spoke from it, saying, "I am Satan. Have me. I will make him rich. I will see that he gets on well in the world." Your father said, "You are the Prince of Bullshitters. I do not want you either, for I do not trust you." And the fire flared, and Satan was gone, also. Later then, as he was halfway to wakefulness, a shadowy figure passed near and told him, "When you awaken walk outside. Stop at the first crossroads you come to. I will meet you there." "Who are you?" your father asked. "I am he who makes everybody equal," came the reply. And your father got up, dressed, went out into the darkness, and waited at the crossroads. There he met Morris Leathem and he invited him to be your godfather, for he said that one who had him for a friend would lack nothing. Do you know what that means, David?

DAVID

Yeah. It's a good thing that he went to the crossroads, or I wouldn't have my bike.

UNCLE MATT

Rose and I weren't present at your christening. We'd had a disagreement with Sam earlier. So neither of us got to meet Morris.

DAVID

I know.

UNCLE MATT

The next time you see him, tell him it had nothing to do with him, or with you. Tell him we wish he'd stop by sometime.

DAVID

You will get to see him. He says everyone does. I'll ask him to name a date for you next time—

UNCLE MATT

(interrupting)

Never mind that!

SCENE 3

Later that evening. DAVID goes out to the porch, climbs onto his bike.

DAVID

Dorel, I'm really happy with you, and I want to go and thank Morrie for such a great birthday present. I don't know where to find him but I've got a feeling you do. I'd like you to help me get to him—now.

DOREL (V.O.)

{SONG: IT'S ROUGH BEING A BIKE}

It's rough being a bike, subject to nicks and dents.
It's tough being a bike, though it makes special sense:
I'm paying for a sin that still seems fresh
Against one who claims his pound of steel
As readily as flesh.

City lights or astral lights, they're all the same to see.
And David's my new master—a good-hearted lad.
He's heading for a crash, though not on me.
I wish that I could warn him for it's sad:
He'll fall into compassion's trap,
And Morrie does not give a rap
For all those things that must be good or bad
(Or all that's in between for elbow room).
Morrie towers to the stars. His feet go down to hell.
He looked at me and spoke my doom.
Now I have wheels and handlebars, creature of his spell,
Now I have very little elbow room.

I wish that I could reach the kid and warn him what I see:
That surely as the gear-teeth mesh
Morrie will have his pound of flesh
Or pound of steel, as the case may be.
It's rough having wheels and handlebars—

Though good for taking corners, dodging cars.
I'd tell him but I lack the elbow room.
There is no way that I can see,
Though all I want's to warn him of his doom
And maybe find a way of getting free.

(The bicycle vibrates.)

Periods of darkness are broken by flashes of light that gradually grow dimmer and shorter. DAVID rides into a dark tunnel. DOREL vibrates and the bike picks up speed. The light grows brighter as DAVID enters a gallery of stalactites and still pools. Lit candles are everywhere—on ledges, niches and on every flat surface. They vary in size. DAVID and the bike come to a halt.

DAVID

Thanks, Dorel.

He sets the kick-stand and walks around, sees tunnels leading off in various directions, all ablaze with candles. occasionally a burnt-down candle stub goes out. Shadows dart about them as they die. DAVID wanders down one of the tunnels, starts back out, only to see MORRIE, wearing a dark cloak, riding slowly toward him on DOREL.

MORRIE

How good of you to come and visit.

DAVID

Wanted to say thanks for the present. Dorel's really neat.

MORRIE

Glad you like him.

(He dismounts and sets the stand)

DAVID

I never knew a bike to have a name before.

MORRIE

(runs a bony finger over the handlebars)

He is someone who owes me a great debt. He is paying it off in this fashion. Would you care for a cup of tea or hot chocolate?

DAVID

I'd like hot chocolate.

They go around the corner and into a niche where a slab of stone bears a red and white calico tablecloth. Two cups and saucers, napkins and spoons are set. Classical music plays. They sit down. MORRIE fills the cups from a carafe. Ghostly figures occasionally pass in the background.

DAVID

What is that music?

MORRIE

Schubert's Quartet in D Minor, a favorite of mine. Marshmallows?

DAVID

Yes, please.

(MORRIE adds them)

Is this where you work, Morrie, or where you live?

MORRIE

(hands DAVID the cup, leans back and cracks his knuckles one by one)

I do a lot of my work in the field. But you might consider this my office, and my apartments are here also. It is really both.

DAVID

I see. It's certainly well-lit.

MORRIE

(He laughs and gestures broadly. A nearby flame flickers.)

She'll think it a fainting spell.

DAVID

Who?

MORRIE

The lady who belongs to that candle. Name's Luisa Trujillo. She's 48 years old and lives in New York City. She's got another 28 years to go. *Bueno.*

(DAVID lowers his cup, turns, and regards the cavern and all of the side chambers and tunnels.)

Yes, all there, all of them. There's one for each of them.

DAVID

I read that there are several billion people in the world.

MORRIE

(nods)

Lot of wax.

DAVID

Good chocolate.

MORRIE

Thanks. The Big Ten's really come upon bad days.

DAVID

Huh?

MORRIE

Everything interesting's happening in the west.

DAVID

Oh, football! You're talking college football, aren't you?

MORRIE

Yes, but I like pro football best. What about you?

DAVID

I don't know enough about it, but I'd like to.

MORRIE

Well, let me tell you a few things…

The lights fade, then come up on the same scene. MORRIE is refilling the cups. David is about 16 years of age now.

MORRIE

You given any thought to what you want to be when you grow up?

DAVID

Not really.

MORRIE

{SONG: "BE A DOCTOR"}

Be a doctor, my boy, for there's a joy
In easing mankind's ills.
You'll also find it gives peace of mind
When it's time to pay your bills.

The world is full of ailments that make them ache and bitch,
The world is full of poisons, wounds, and such,
With stomach cramps and loss of sense
And coronary accidents and lots of things that hurt so very much.
You'll learn them all, you'll treat them all,
You'll be there when the patients call.
You'll deal with each little tic and twitch.
You'll give them relaxation, relieve their consternation,
You'll treat their every cough and wound and itch.
For you will be a doctor, a very special doctor,
A master of diseases of the rich.

And you will know the special joy
That comes of easing pain, my boy.
You'll close a wound and never drop a stitch.
You'll give them relaxation, relieve their consternation,
And be master of diseases of the rich.
Yes, you'll master the diseases of the rich.

MORRIE

You'd have a knack for it. I'd see to that. Game of chess?

DAVID

All right.

MORRIE and DAVID are playing chess, using the squares on the tablecloth for the board and pieces made of aged bone.

DAVID

A physician?

MORRIE

Yes, think about it.

DAVID

All right, I will.

Lights fade, come up on an adult DAVID, playing chess at the table with Morrie.

DAVID

I resign. You've got me in four moves.

MORRIE

Three.

(Leans back.)

Soon it will be time for you to be off to college.

DAVID

We don't have the money for it.

MORRIE

Don't worry about that. A distant relative will leave you sufficient funds soon. One thing more—

DAVID

Yes?

MORRIE

Since you're going away, it shouldn't be difficult. I want you to break up with that girl Betty.

DAVID

Why?

MORRIE

It's not fair to ask her to wait. They never do, anyhow.

DAVID

She might.

MORRIE

No. Just do as I say. Free yourself of the lady and that cheap politician father of hers.

DAVID

Do I have to?

MORRIE

I insist. Don't worry. It's easy to cast away remembering at certain times in your life—and this is one of them. I'll help you.

[Fade.]

SCENE 4

Evening, country road, trees. David and Betty, walking, stopping near the trees.

DAVID

You know I'll be going away soon, to college.

BETTY

Yes.

DAVID

So I wanted to say good-bye.

BETTY

At least you'll be back—holidays and summers.

DAVID

Maybe. But I don't know how my time will run then. I may be studying, or working. So I thought I'd say good-bye now.

BETTY

(Studying his face)

Okay. I'll be waiting.

DAVID

I'd hate to have you waste your time—waiting—for someone who'll be gone so long.

BETTY

I don't mind. Well, I'll mind—But I'll wait, Dave. Really. Lots of people wait that way. You want me to, don't you?

DAVID

(Looks away)

I can't ask that.

BETTY

(Taking his hand)

I know. I offered.

DAVID

Don't! I—I—

The shadowy figure of MORRIE passes in the twilight. Faint strains of the theme from "Remembering" accompany him.

BETTY

What do you mean?

DAVID

Don't wait. It's too long.

BETTY

I'm willing, Dave. I'm willing. You do want me one day, don't you?

DAVID

(Drawing away)

I've got to go now, Betty. Don't wait.

(He turns away and begins to walk.)

BETTY

David! We never talked about it in so many words, but I thought—I thought you cared for me. I thought we had an—understanding.

DAVID

No. No understanding. Don't wait. Good-bye, Betty.

(Walks away. Spotlight remains on Betty.)

BETTY

{SONG: WHY'S GOOD-BYE SO EASY FOR HIM?}

Why's good-bye so easy for him?
How can he walk away
As if I never mattered?
He shattered my world and went his way.
Why's good-bye an easy thing,
So easy for him to say?

Did I do something wrong?
He never told me so.
I cared for him so long.
I thought one day we'd be
—just him and me.
Now he gives me a quick good-bye,
Has nothing more to say.
How can it be so easy for him
To turn and walk away?

I'll miss him, I'll miss him.
I wish it weren't so.
My dreams have ended with the day.
Never thought I'd see him go.
Does he even know I'll miss him,
My man who went away?

Spotlight shifts to DAVID, farther along the road (other side of stage).

DAVID

{SONG: REMEMBERING}

Remembering, remembering, where candles burn and
spirits sing,
A girl I knew when I was but a lad.
She walked with me, she laughed with me. We shared a
dream or two—
That girl I knew from whom I'm walking sad.

We played together, we held each other,
In field and city above. Remembering her tears, her smile,
I fear to remember a longer while—
I might remember I'm in love.

Remembering, remembering, as I walk away,
The days of skinned knees, frogs, and fading dreams,
The nights of homework, games, and school dances.
He's right, I know. I've no time for romances.
Forgetting now, I walk away. Out there it's push and shove.
There won't be time to remember that once I was in love.

Remembering, remembering, a thing I must not do.
Where candles burn and spirits sing I cast away
remembering.
I walk away from field and city above. Good-bye, I sing,
Remembering. Good-bye, good-bye to love.

When DAVID's song is finished, MORRIE joins him and they exit. BETTY's voice is heard, singing the last stanza of "Why's Good-bye So Easy for Him?" again.

BETTY

I'll miss him, I'll miss him.
I wish it weren't so.
My dreams have ended with the day.
Never thought I'd see him go.
Does he even know I'll miss him,
My man who went away?

ACT II

SCENE 1

A hospital. DAVID, wearing whites and a stethoscope, stands looking at a medical chart at the nurse's station, a cup of coffee resting beside him. MORRIE enters, walking down the hall toward him.

MORRIE

Hi, Dave. That one in Number Seven. She'll be checking out at 3:12 a.m.

(He sits down next to DAVID.)

Too bad about the fellow in Number Sixteen.

DAVID

Ah, he was fading fast. We knew it was just a matter of time.

MORRIE

You could have saved that one, Dave.

DAVID

We tried everything we knew.

DAVID

{SONG: "OH, HOW THE DYING GOES ON}

Oh, how the dying goes on, goes on; oh, how the dying
    goes on.
The wards are full of people in irreparable shape
Whose vital signs are going off the charts.
Their hearts are ticking wackily, their coughs are coming
    hackily,
And some are missing major body parts.
From their fevers, chills, and stupors they slip off one by one,
In the dead of night they *are* the dead of night.
A few of them will linger, a few will jump the gun,
One by one. Some folks can't do anything quite right.

And oh, how the dying goes on, goes on; oh, how the
dying goes on.
I check a pulse, prescribe a pill, I order tests and scans,
Massage a heart, reduce a dose, leave orders for the nurse
And I wonder whether Morrie is their blessing or their curse.
He touches them, they sigh away to dark unknown lands,
He gathers all things mortal with cold immortal hands.
I hear their sighs, I hear their cries, give comfort where I might.
This place is a necropolis, a city of the night.
He comes for them, he comes for them. In the end his will
prevails.
I'm proud to be related to one who never fails.
But sometimes it's discouraging to lose to him this way.
Has he a weakness, I wonder? Some thing he'd never say?

I took this job to learn to heal, to cure, to lengthen life.
Instead I hear a coughing and the weeping of some wife
Who soon will be a widow, chic in black. I tried each trick
But none would click. Morrie has his way.
I cannot call them back, alack, and Morrie wins the day.
He comes for them, he comes for them. He takes them far away.
Morrie takes them to him, Morrie has his say—
And oh, how the dying goes on, goes on; oh, how the
dying goes on.

MORRIE

Guess you're going to have to learn a few more things, then.

DAVID

If you're teaching, I'll take notes.

MORRIE

Not yet, but soon.

(He reaches out, touches DAVID's cup of coffee. Steam begins rising from it. He rises and faces the window.)

About time.

(A car horn blares o.s., followed by the sound of a collision.)

I'm needed. Good night.

(exits)

Lights fade, come up on a park. DAVID addresses the audience.

DAVID

He didn't mention it again for a long while, and I almost thought he'd forgotten. Then, one day the following spring, a sunny and deliciously balmy occasion, I went walking in the park. Suddenly, it seemed that I cast two shadows. Then one of them spoke to me.

MORRIE

Lovely day, eh, Dave?

(He is dressed entirely in black, and carries a potting trowel.)

DAVID

Morrie, you're very quiet when you come up on a person.

MORRIE

Indeed.

DAVID

You're dressed awfully solemnly for such a fine, bright morning.

MORRIE

Working clothes.

DAVID

That's why you're carrying a potting trowel?

MORRIE

Right.

They walk in silence. A small band of hikers passes. MORRIE reaches out and touches one on the shoulder. The man immediately clutches his chest and falls to the ground. MORRIE and DAVID pass cross-stream to a place where MORRIE abruptly drops to his knees at the foot of a small rise, extends his hands amid the grasses, and spreads them. A flowering plant lies between his extended forefingers and thumbs, bearing both blue and yellow flowers. DAVID looks at the plant closely.

MORRIE

Yes, study it.

DAVID

I can't identify it.

MORRIE

I would be most surprised if you could. It is quite rare, and the only sure way to know it and to find it when you need it is by means of introduction and by words of summoning, which I shall teach you.

DAVID

I see.

MORRIE

And in your case it will be necessary to place samples under cultivation in your apartment. For you must learn its usages more deeply than any other who knows of it. Roots, leaves, stalks, flowers—each part has a separate virtue, and they can be made to work in a wide variety of combinations.

DAVID

I don't understand. I've spent all this time getting a first-rate medical education. Now you want me to become an herbalist?

MORRIE

(laughs)

No, of course not. You need your techniques as well as your credentials. I am not asking you to abandon the methods you have learned for helping people, but merely to add another for…special cases.

DAVID

Involving that little plant?

MORRIE

Exactly.

DAVID

What's it called?

MORRIE

Bleafage. You won't find it in any herbal or botany text. Come here. Let me introduce you and teach you the words. Then you'll remove it and take it to your home to cultivate.

Lights fade. DAVID comes forward and addresses the audience.

DAVID

I ate, drank, and even slept with the bleafage. Morrie stopped by periodically and instructed me in its use. I learned to make tinctures, poultices, salves, plasters, pills, wines, oils, liniments, syrups, douches, enemas, electuaries, and fomentations of every part and combination of parts of the thing. I even learned how to smoke it. Finally, I began taking a little of it to work with me every now and then and tried it on a number of serious cases, always with remarkable results.

DAVID

{SONG: "OH, WONDROUS WEED"}

Oh, wondrous weed! Sovereign of ills!
Your virtue is greater than all the world's pills.
Modest, shy, retiring weed, to know you're there in time of need
Is balm unto the stricken, hope for all who sicken,
Mercy to the ailing, a hand unto the failing.
You tonify and purify and fix up damaged parts;
You outbiot the antis and you stabilize our hearts;
You lower our blood pressures and you clean our livers, too;
You halt the great attritions of the worst human conditions
 without a bit of fuss.
You even speed digestion while you're clearing up
 congestion.
You're good for everything that ails us.

But weed, weed, weed, weed, such a name as bleafage

Is too simple for your power. Such a name belies
The virtues you possess. You come to us in darkest hour,
Trailing clouds of bliss and balm.
You save our lives and banish pain.
You deserve a better name—than bleafage.
For you've advanced degrees in life and mess and pain.
So just between the two of us, I'll call you Morrie's Bane.
Yes, just between the two of us, I'll call you Morrie's Bane.

Oh, wondrous weed! Sovereign of ills!
Your virtue is greater than all the world's pills.
You save our lives, you banish pain;
You outbiot the antis and you flush our kidneys, too.
I'm glad I found a better, more descriptive name for you,
My distinguished colleague Morrie's Bane
(I think I see the beginning of a beautiful friendship),
Dear friend and colleague Morrie's Bane.

SCENE 2

DAVID

(addressing audience)

My next birthday, Morrie took me to a restaurant in town, and afterwards an elevator in the parking garage seemed to keep descending, finally releasing us in his office.

(DAVID takes his place with MORRIE in cavern, and addresses MORRIE)

Neat trick, that.

They walk through the tunnel. Shadowy servants light fresh candles and remove the remains of those which have expired. MORRIE stops and removes a stump of a candle from a case, lights it from the guttering flame of another one upon a ledge, and replaces the old one with the other, just as the former goes out.

DAVID

What did you just do, Morrie? I've never seen you replace one before.

MORRIE

I don't do it often. But that woman you fed the bleafage to this afternoon—the one in 465—she's just rallied.

(He measures the candle-stump between thumb and forefinger.)

Six years, eight months, three days, seven hours, fourteen minutes, twenty-three seconds. That's how much life you've bought her.

DAVID

Oh.

MORRIE

I'm not angry, if that's what you're wondering. You must try the bleafage out if you're to understand its power.

DAVID

Tell me. Is it a power over life or a power over death that we're discussing?

MORRIE

That's droll! Is it one of those Zen things? I rather like it.

DAVID

No, it was a serious question.

MORRIE

Well, mine is a power over life. And yours is vice-versa. We're sort of "yin-yang" that way.

DAVID

But you're not restricted to your specialty, not when you have this bleafage business going for you, too.

MORRIE

David, I can't use the herb. I can only teach you about it. I require a human master of bleafage to use it for me.

DAVID

Oh, I see.

MORRIE

Not entirely, I'm certain. Go ahead and experiment. It may seem that the people you treat with it all come to you by chance, but this will not always be the case.

(DAVID nods and studies the candles.)

Do you have a question?

DAVID

Yes. That candle-stub you used for purposes of extending Mrs. Emerson, of Room 465, for six years plus…how did it come to be snuffed out at just that point, rather than having burned itself all the way down? It's almost as if you'd—snuffed someone prematurely.

MORRIE

(grinning)

It is, isn't it? As I mentioned, death *is* a power over life. Let's have some coffee and our brandy now, shall we?

Lights fade. DAVID comes forward and addresses the audience.

DAVID

I was more than a little puzzled by the way Morrie ran his business. But it was his show and he'd always been kind to me. He'd given me a whole wardrobe for a birthday present, and when I completed my residency he gave me a new car. Dorel was still in fine fettle, but I needed a car once I began my practice. I moved Dorel to the rear of the garage and rode him only on weekends. But I found myself going out there more and more, evenings, sitting on the high stool beside the workbench, popping the tab on a cold one and talking to him the way I had when I was a kid.

SCENE 3

He steps back as the lights come up on DOREL in the garage. DAVID addresses the black bike.

DAVID

Funny that *he* should give me a wonder drug for saving lives. On the other hand, it's obvious that he did sort of push me into medicine. Could it be that he wants control over the life-*giving* half of the yin-yang? Not just letting someone live, but assuring quality time by removing causes of suffering?

(DOREL'S frame creaks. The bike's headlight blinks on and off.)

Is that an affirmative?

(The blinking is repeated.)

Okay, I'll take that as a yes. And two for "no."

(One blink.)

It would make a kind of sense, for two reasons. First, back when I was still at the hospital, I gave a sample of bleafage to Dr. Kaufman, a biochemist, and asked him whether he could determine its major constituents. He died in the lab the next day, and a fire destroyed whatever he was working on. Later, I ran into Morrie in the morgue, and he told me that synthesizing bleafage was a no-no. He did not want it to become as common as aspirin or antibiotics. That would make it seem he only wanted certain persons to benefit. Second, I believe this guess was confirmed by the instructions he gave me when I set up in private practice. Morrie told me I'd get calls from all over for consultations. He never said where they'd get my name or number or why they'd want me, but he was right. They did start coming in. He told me to take my bleafage with me whenever I went, and that the entire diagnosis and treatment—or lack of it—would be governed solely by a matter of personal perception. I can see Morrie when other people can't. He said that in those special cases where I'm called in to consult, he would enter the room. If he stands at the head of the bed, the patient will live. I may treat as I would. But if he stands at the foot, I'm to perform a few routine tests and pronounce it a hopeless case. It almost seems as if there were an agenda, as if he had a special deal with some people or a plan into which they fit.

(DOREL'S light blinks once)

Ah, you think so, too! Do you know what it is?

(The light blinks twice, then a third time)

Yes and no? You have some guesses, but you're not sure?

(One blink)

Of course, no matter what the reasons, I'm helping a lot of people who wouldn't be helped otherwise.

(One blink)

Morrie once said that you're working off a debt by being a bicycle.

(One blink)

I didn't understand what he meant then, and I still don't. Is there a way you could tell me?

(One blink)

Well, what is it?

DOREL rolls across the garage and leans against the wall, still and lightless. The phone above the workbench rings. DAVID answers.

DAVID

Hello?

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

This is Dr. Puleo, Dan Puleo. I know your reputation. We met at that ER seminar this spring.

DAVID

I remember.

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

Speaking of emergencies…

DAVID

You got one?

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

There's a limousine on the way to pick you up.

DAVID

To take me where?

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

The governor's mansion.

DAVID

This involves Caisson himself?

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

Yes.

DAVID

How come he's not in the hospital?

DR. PULEO (O.S.)

He will be, but you're near and I think you can beat the ambulance.

DAVID

I think I can beat the limo, too, if I take the bike trail through the park.

(He hangs up, grabs his medical kit, runs back to the garage and addresses DOREL.)

We've got to get to the governor's mansion fast!

Lights cross-fade, come up on bedroom in governor's mansion. LOU CAISSON lies motionless in the bed. DR. PULEO stands next to DAVID.

DR. PULEO

He had a bad bout of flu recently, and gall stones last year. No history of heart problems.

DAVID

(moving toward the bed)

How are his vitals?

DR. PULEO

He doesn't have any, at the moment.

MORRIE enters and, shaking his head, stands at the foot of the bed. Sirens are heard o.s. as DAVID addresses the audience.

DAVID

Suddenly, I was mad! I was swept by a wave of anger over every decision in my life that Morrie had influenced. In an instant, looking back, I saw just how manipulated I had been with all his little bribes and attentions.

DAVID opens his med kit and places it on the bed.

DR. PULEO

Are you going to treat him?

DAVID slides his arms under CAISSON, picks him up, walks around the foot of the bed behind MORRIE, and lays him back down again, placing MORRIE at his head. DAVID reaches across and picks up his kit.

DR. PULEO

I can't take any responsibility—

DAVID

(Filling a long syringe)

If I treat him right now he'll live. If I don't he'll die. It's as simple as that.

(He unbuttons CAISSON'S pajama top and opens it.)

MORRIE

David, don't do it!

DAVID injects CAISSON in the chest with contents of the syringe. He straightens. MORRIE glares at him, then turns and walks out of the room. CAISSON gasps. DAVID checks his carotid.

DAVID

There's a pulse now.

CAISSON opens his eyes. DAVID puts his kit away and buttons CAISSON's pajama top.

DAVID

You'll be all right.

DR. PULEO

What course of treatment is indicated now?

DAVID

Put him in the ICU and watch him for 24 hours. If he's okay after that you can do whatever you want with him.

DR. PULEO

What about continuing medication?

DAVID

Negative. Excuse me, I have to go now.

DAVID turns to the door. BETTY stands there.

BETTY

{SONG: THE MAN WHO WENT AWAY}

Him! Why did it have to be him?
Why did it have to be one who once meant to me
More than I ever can say?
Why did it have to be David who came,
The man who went away?

Why did it have to be him
Who came to save the day?
Why did he come with his bag and his art,
The man who squeezed and tore my heart,
The man who dumped my world and went away?

Standing here in the hallway of my life
On a dark evening in this house of the dead,
I see the man emerge from the room,
And he smiles at me. Can it be
He's stopped the traffic to the tomb?
Is it implied that with him on our side
Death's decided to call it a day?
Could he have beaten that specter dread,
My man who went away?

Him! There's lots of pain and turmoil.
I don't know what to say. But I find I'm smiling back
At the man who went away.
Old memories rise like butterflies,
Spread their wings before my eyes.
And he nods and he turns and he comes this way.
I wonder what he'll say?

DAVID

Hi, Betty.

BETTY

David, is he going to be all right?

DAVID

Yes.

(a pause)

How've you been?

BETTY

Oh, pretty well.

DAVID

(starts for the door, then stops)

Could we talk for a minute, in private?

(She leads him into an adjacent sitting room, where they sit.)

I wanted you to know I've been missing you for a long time, and I'm sorry about the way I broke up with you. I suppose you've got a boyfriend now?

BETTY

I take it that means you're unencumbered yourself?

DAVID

That's right.

BETTY

And if I am, too?

DAVID

I'd like to go out with you again. Get to know you again. Is there any possibility you'd be interested?

BETTY

I could tell you that I'm going to have to think about it. But that wouldn't be true. I have thought about it, and the answer is yes, I will go out with you, but just for old times' sake.

He reaches out and takes her hand. As the lights fade, they sit holding hands and talking.

SCENE 4

DAVID is riding DOREL through the park at night. He turns on DOREL's headlight.

DAVID

{THEME: IT'S ROUGH BEING A BIKE.}

Talk, damn you! I want your opinion.

DOREL

All right.

DAVID

What?!

DOREL

I said, "All right." What do you want to know?

DAVID

How come you wouldn't talk to me earlier?

DOREL

I could only talk if you ordered me to. This is the first time you have.

DAVID

What are you—really?

DOREL

I was a physician he'd trained in early 19th-century Kentucky. Name's Don Laurel. I did something he didn't like. Manufactured and sold a patent medicine—Laurel's Bleafage Tonic.

DAVID

Must have helped some people he didn't want helped.

DOREL

Aye, and maybe a few horses, too.

DAVID

I just saved someone he didn't want saved.

DOREL

I don't know what to tell you—except that I was arrogant and insolent when he confronted me concerning the medicine, and I wound up as transportation. You might want to try a different tack.

DAVID

Thanks.

(He plucks a quarter from under the headlight and flips it.)

Tails. I will.

Lights fade, come up on DAVID'S apartment. MORRIE enters.

DAVID

Evening. Care for a cup of tea?

MORRIE

David, how could you? I've been good to you, haven't I? How could you go against my express wishes that way?

MORRIE

{SONG: "BETRAYED"}

Betrayed!
In learning the feelings, one by one,
Betrayed's not a good thing to know.

I trusted the kid and look what he did:
He saved a man I wanted dead.
It's sure to go to his head,
Not the way I wanted things to go.

I'm mad right now.
He's got to learn
That I say who shall die or live.
Though I made a vow, I'm doing a burn
That makes it hard to forgive.

I'll have to speak with him.
I want this thing set right.
If it goes to his head
And he raises the dead
We're heading for a fight.
Though David's my godson
Who taught me to care
Betrayed's not a good thing to know,
And it's there, and it's there, now it's there!
Betrayed's not a good thing to know.

DAVID

I'm sorry, Morrie. I did it because I felt sorry for the guy—starting off with such a great year in office, particularly those health care programs, putting all those fat cat business interests in their place, and being taken out of the game so suddenly. And—well, I used to date his daughter. She's the one you made me break up with years ago. I still like her, as a matter of fact. That's why I did it.

MORRIE

(squeezes DAVID's shoulder)

David, you're a good-hearted boy. It's hard to fault a man for compassion, but in my line of work it can be a liability. You're going to have to be ruled by your head, not your heart, when you're working my cases, you understand?

DAVID

Yes, Morrie.

MORRIE

Okay. Let's have a cup of tea and talk football.

Lights fade, come up on the same scene. MORRIE is no longer onstage. The phone rings, DAVID answers it.

DAVID

Hello? Oh, yes! How are you feeling, Governor?

CAISSON (O.S.)

Fine, and I know I owe you a lot, but that's not why I'm calling.

DAVID

Emergency?

CAISSON

That's right. It's Betty, and from what Puleo told me about my seizure this sounds like the same thing. He didn't say anything about it being contagious.

DAVID

I'll be right over.

CAISSON

Should I call an ambulance?

DAVID

No.

(Hangs up, gets his medical kit, goes to DOREL.)

Betty's got the same thing her dad did.

DOREL

What are you going to do?

DAVID

You know what I'm going to do.

DOREL

I was afraid of that.

ACT III

SCENE 1

{THEME: "REMEMBERING"}

BETTY'S bedroom. BETTY lies unconscious in the bed. DAVID is checking her over as MORRIE enters the room and stands at the foot of the bed. DAVID draws medicine from a vial into a syringe, then turns BETTY around so that MORRIE is standing by her head.

MORRIE

David, I forbid it!

DAVID

Sorry, Morrie.

He administers the injection. BETTY opens her eyes. DAVID leans down and kisses her. MORRIE reaches over and grips DAVID's shoulder.

MORRIE

Me, too.

{THEME: "BETRAYED"}

Lights fade, come up on cave as MORRIE leads DAVID through a tunnel lined with candles, and into his office. DAVID notices that one of the candles is much lower than all of the others and is flickering.

DAVID

It was worth trying. I love her, you know.

MORRIE

(chuckles)

Oh, you think that that's *her* candle? No. You don't understand. She'll live. You've seen to that. Her candle is already in good shape. This is *your* candle. You started out kind of handicapped in that regard. Sorry.

DAVID

You mean that's all I have left? Maybe a few minutes? And you didn't mess with it because you're mad at me? That's *really* the way it is?

MORRIE

That's right.

DAVID

Any, uh, chance of an…extension?

MORRIE

When you've crossed my will a second time, after I'd warned you?

DAVID

I didn't do it lightly. You know how I feel about Betty. There was no real choice. I had to save her. Perhaps such emotions are something you can't quite understand.

MORRIE

(frowns, then laughs)

Of course I can understand caring about something! Why do you think I'd decided to take Governor Caisson right when I did? The son of a bitch's business policies had just cost the town a pro football franchise—for one of my favorite teams. And I'd been angling to get them here for decades.

DAVID

So you *were* grabbing him off early?

MORRIE

You bet I was! Then you had to butt in for the first time in your life.

DAVID

I begin to understand…Say, Morrie, you know it's not too late to transfer my flame to a fresh candle.

MORRIE

True. And you *are* my godson. That still counts for something.

(He stares at the candle)

Probably should. Shouldn't stay mad forever. Family counts for something.

He stoops and reaches into an opened case back in a recess in the wall. As he does so, DAVID withdraws his left hand from his pocket and reaches forward, touching the failing candle. Drawing forth a fresh candle, MORRIE stands and reaches forward with his other hand toward DAVID's sputtering taper. He touches it, begins to raise it. Then it slips from his fingers and plunges to the ground.

MORRIE

Shit! Sorry, David!

[Candle goes out. Fade.]

SCENE 2

Lights come up on same scene. MORRIE is no longer there. DAVID is lying on his stomach on the floor. DOREL stands nearby. DAVID raises his head, looks about. He places his palms on the floor and pushes himself up. A candle stub is guttering beside him.

DOREL

Get a candle out of the box, Dave! Hurry! You've got to take the flame from the other before it dies again! Never saw one come back on again the way yours did.

DAVID reaches for a small item lying beside the candle, picks up his Five Minute Time Warp. He had activated it when he touched the candle earlier.

DAVID

I knew I'd find a use for the Five Minute Time Warp one day!

With his other hand, DAVID gropes in the carton, takes out a candle, moves it to a position above the failing flame and holds it there. The fresh candle catches the flame. He turns the candle upright and rises to his feet.

DOREL

I want to take you to another tunnel where we can hide your candle amid many. We ought to hurry, in case he's still in the area.

DAVID walks with DOREL, carrying his candle.

DAVID

Could you locate Betty's candle, too?

DOREL

Given the time, the appropriate form and the access.

(They continue walking down another tunnel.)

I used to work here. I was an invisible entity before he made me a bike. If I were an invisible entity here again I could keep moving your candle and Betty's so that he'd never know. I could correct any number of his petty abuses the way I used to. Might keep lighting you new ones, too, if you got into bleafage research.

DAVID

I could be persuaded. What would it take to make you an invisible entity again?

DOREL

I'm not permitted to say.

DAVID

Even if I order you?

DOREL

Even then. This is a different category of restriction. I can't think of a way to tell you how to get around this one.

They move a little farther down the tunnel and stop.

DOREL

To your left, in that low niche where several others are burning.

DAVID dribbles a little wax to anchor his candle, sets it upon that spot, holds it in place until it's fixed.

DOREL

Mount.

(DAVID climbs onto the seat)

Back to where you were?

DAVID

Yes.

They arrive in front of the governor's mansion, DAVID dismounts, sets the kickstand. The front door opens. BETTY appears.

BETTY

Dave!

(DAVID watches as she approaches him. They embrace.)

Dave, what happened? You just sort of faded away.

DAVID

My godfather, Morrie, took me. I'd done something he didn't like.

BETTY

Your godfather? You never mentioned him before. How could he do that?

DAVID

He is a person with a great power over life, who is responsible for whatever power I possess over death. Fortunately, he thinks I'm dead now. So I believe I'll have some reconstructive surgery, change the spelling of my name, grow a beard, move to another state and run a small, low-key practice to cover the expense of my bleafage research. I love you. Will you marry me and come along?

DOREL

I hate to tell you that you sound a little crazy, Dave, but you do.

BETTY

(staring at bike)

Are you a ventriloquist, too?

DAVID

No, that was Dorel talking. He just saved my life. He's a rebel spirit doing time as a bicycle, and he's been with me since I was a kid. Saved my life a couple of times then, too.

DAVID pats DOREL's seat. BETTY leans forward and kisses the top of the handlebars.

BETTY

I know. I've ridden him with you, remember? Thanks, Dorel, whatever you are.

DOREL falls apart into a smoking collection of golden motes.

BETTY

What did I just set off?

DAVID

Beats me. But since there was no frog I don't think you get a prince.

BETTY

Guess I'm stuck with you, then.

They watch as the bright cloud assembles itself into a human shape—that of a tall, bewhiskered man in buckskins. He bows to BETTY.

DON LAUREL

Don Laurel. At your service, ma'am.

(He turns and shakes DAVID's hand.)

Sorry to deprive you of transportation, Dave. But I just got my enchantment broken.

DAVID

Calls for a celebration.

DON LAUREL

(shaking his head)

Now that I'm unbiked I have to find a niche quick, or I'll fade to airy nothingness. So I'll be heading back below, and I'll take up residence in the caves. He'll never spot an extra invisible entity. And I'll keep moving both of your candles out of his way. Good luck with the bleafage work. I'll be in touch.

He turns to smoke again. When it clears he is gone.

DAVID

That's a relief.

(He embraces BETTY once again.)

But I wish things had gone differently with Morrie. I like him. I'm going to miss him.

BETTY

He doesn't exactly sound like a nice guy.

DAVID

His line of work hardens him a bit. He's actually quite sensitive.

BETTY

How can you tell?

DAVID

He likes football and chess.

BETTY

They both represent violence—physical, and abstract.

DAVID

…and hot chocolate. And Schubert's Quartet in D Minor. And he does care about the balance between life and death, most of the time.

BETTY

I know he's family. But he scares me.

DAVID

{SONG: LET'S DO IT}

I want to run away with you
And live with you and walk with you
And all those other things they do
When people fall in love.

All those years we missed
With days we never kissed
Were times ground down to grist
Without your love.
The chariot's wings were clipped,
Its wheels greased.
I could not hear it at my back
Nor to the west nor east.
I'd set upon a fast track and I tripped.
I'd cast away remembering,
I'd walked away from you,
Forgetting all the things that make up love.

Come live with me and let us see
And prove and hold and just plain be
Whatever's best for you and me
Now we have found our love.

I want to run away with you
And live with you and walk with you
And all the other things they do
When people fall in love.

BETTY comes in on repeat of last two stanzas.

BETTY & DAVID

Come live with me and let us see
And prove and hold and just plain be
Whatever's best for you and me
Now we have found our love.

I want to run away with you
And live with you and walk with you
And all the other things they do
When people fall in love.

DAVID

Well, we're going incognito now. Morrie shouldn't be a problem if we keep a low profile.

[Fade.]

SCENE 3

DAVID

(addresses audience)

I was able to leave it at that for a long time. Betty and I were married, and I did change my name and move to a small town in the South—though I opted against cosmetic surgery. The beard and tinted glasses and a different hair style altered my appearance considerably, or so I thought. I built up a satisfactory practice, had a greenhouse full of bleafage, and set up a small home laboratory. For over a year I managed not to be present at life-and-death crises, and when visiting my patients in the hospital I was able to avoid other patients at terminal moments which might have resulted in an undesired family reunion. You might say I was pathologically circumspect in this regard; even so, I did glimpse Morrie going around corners on a few occasions. I kept wondering, though, given my line of work, when—not if—we would meet, and whether I would be able to carry the encounter with sufficient aplomb so as not to reveal that I possessed the ability to see him. When it did occur, of course, it was nowhere near the hospital, and I was not even thinking of these matters. It was a summer-hot Saturday evening…

Squeal of brakes followed by the sound of a heavy impact o.s. DAVID grabs his medical kit, and a flashlight and runs out. BETTY follows him to the corner where two cars have collided. There is broken glass everywhere. Each vehicle has but a driver. DAVID moves rapidly to one of them, checks for a pulse, shakes his head. The other driver, a younger man, was thrown from the car and lies on the pavement, covered with blood. DAVID checks him, too.

DAVID

(to BETTY)

He's still breathing. Go call 911!

BETTY exits. DAVID slaps a cover on the man's pneumothorax and moves to deal with the bleeding. MORRIE enters. DAVID glances up, returns to his work with a nod.

DAVID

Can't argue with you about this one. Take him if you must.

MORRIE

No. Save him for me, Dave. Shoot him up with bleafage. You've got all the time you need.

DAVID

What's so special about him, Morrie? I haven't forgotten how you treated me when I wanted to make an exception.

MORRIE

All right. I'll forgive and forget if you'll do the same—and save this guy. My power, as I've said, is not over death. If I simply don't take him, he'll be a vegetable.

DAVID

Then how's about you promise to let me save whom I wish, and do whatever I would with the bleafage? You know I'll be discreet.

MORRIE

Looks like you're doing it, anyway. But all right, I'll make it formal.

DAVID

I wish you could have been at my wedding, Morrie.

MORRIE

I was there.

DAVID

You were? I didn't see you.

MORRIE

I was in the back. I wore bright colors so you wouldn't notice me.

DAVID

The guy in the Hawaiian shirt?

MORRIE

Yes, that was me.

DAVID

I'll be damned.

MORRIE

And I sent you that microwave oven.

DAVID

There was no card with it—

MORRIE

Well, we weren't talking.

DAVID

I did wonder about the CandlePower brand name. Good oven, though, I'll give you that. Thanks.

(Injured man on ground moans)

About this guy, Morrie…why are you so dead set against taking him?

MORRIE

You don't recognize him?

DAVID

Too much blood on his face.

MORRIE

That's the new quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons.

DAVID

No kidding. But what about the balance between life and death and all that?

MORRIE

They're really going to need him this season.

MORRIE

{SONG: "SAVE THAT QUARTERBACK"}

Save that quarterback!
Save that quarterback!
I want to see him livin'.
Save that quarterback, lad.
All is long forgiven.

We've had our little differences
But families work that way.
It's time for mending fences
And whatever else we may—

Like that quarterback lying there
Leaking on the ground.
Give him the works
Till he twitches and jerks
And you bring him back around.

Bring that quarterback back.
I want to see him play.
I want to hear the crowd cry out
One bright autumn day.

I want to see him score.
I want to see them win.
Oh, bring that quarterback back
And let the game begin!

They need him, they need him.
They need him
What more can I say?
Save that quarterback,
Save that quarterback
And you'll save the day!

DAVID

I forgot you were a Falcons fan.

MORRIE

The bleafage, boy, the bleafage!

As the lights fade, DAVID approaches and addresses the audience.

DAVID

And so… The Falcons have been doing well for some time now, not the least because of their new quarterback. Not too many people die during Falcons games, because Morrie comes by for beer and pizza and we watch them on the tube together. He collects with a vengeance afterwards, though, if the Falcons don't do well. Read the obits. Morrie hints strongly that he'd like to know what I did with the candles. But he can keep on wondering. Don Laurel and I stay in touch. He comes by every Halloween for a glass of blood with a dash of heparin and we bring each other up to date on everything from bleafage to candles. And sometimes he changes into a bicycle for old times' sake, and we ride between the worlds. This morning I walked back to the crossroads where the accident had occurred…

DAVID turns back to previous scene. Cars and drivers are gone. MORRIE stands beside a lamp post, petting a dead cat.

MORRIE

Morning, Dave.

DAVID

Morning. You're up bright and early.

MORRIE

Thought you might be coming by. When's she due?

DAVID

In the spring.

MORRIE

You really want me for godfather?

DAVID

Can't think of anyone I'd rather have. Was that the same dream you sent my dad?

MORRIE

No. It's a remake. I updated it. Been watching some MTV.

DAVID

Kind of thought so. Care for a cup of coffee?

MORRIE

Don't mind if I do.

They walk off together.

THE END

Notes

Zelazny adapted his short story "Godson" into this three-act musical, a project that excited him. He wrote lyrics to a dozen songs and discussed with Santa Fe musician Bruce Dunlap the possibility that Dunlap would write the music. The manuscript's first page states, "lyrics by Roger Zelazny and music by Bruce Dunlap," but Dunlap did not write it. Zelazny performed this play for friends at a party a few months before he died. He chanted the lyrics. With original music by David G. Grubbs, Jerry Sabatini, and Debra LeBrun, *Godson* was first performed at Boskone in 2010 and reprised at Renovation, the 2011 Worldcon.

The phrase **diseases of the rich** in the song "Be a Doctor" recalls Tom Lehrer's remarks at the beginning of his song "In Old Mexico". See the afterword to "Godson" for additional remarks.

OUR OWN PIECE OF THE SKY

Written in 1994; previously unpublished.

We are the stuff of which the stars are made
Naked as the newborn we do not feel the cold
We come and go in the sky
Beasts the dreamers ride 'round heaven's carousel
Our lives reflected in the galaxies' bright blades

I seek the fair Serpent in my nightly hunt
Sometimes find her skin on quasar hung to dry
I follow her stardust track through sunless stillness
Seek her beyond the milky streams of stars
Pursue her down coaly canyons of dim and drifting dust
When I call across the night she is my hunting cry

Cats tag comets let them go
Rut on the rooftops of worlds
Fill in the 10-centimeter band with their howls
They are the pets of the Pleiades

I am Alf the Hunter walking in darkness wearing light
Life reflected in galaxy's bright blade
I circle forever a story-length away
If I find you you will never be the same
Look up and know the wonder I have seen
We are the stuff of which the stars are made

Notes

Zelazny's final manuscript of *Psychoshop* shows that he intended this poem to end the novel. Evidently Editor John Betancourt deleted the poem, removing a characteristic Zelazny touch that should be restored in a future reprinting of *Psychoshop*.

THE APPETITE AND RISING SUN

Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky;* previously unpublished.

Now let the Chaos come
Too long has the City stood
in form held against the eating—
Shells, like this our balcony—
frail in iron, silly in stone,
holding ingredient
the multiplying brick,
the moving and pedestal bridge,
the tunic tarpaulin—
Hungers in these shapes approximate all vastness,
and feed upon its Form.

I cannot touch myself, really,
but eviscerate tall buildings,
and in eating, burn a bird;
I cannot make higher the steeple than my unmaking—
and in the filing of a lock
have felt the stroke of Genesis
tugging a blade's rasp!
—I burn a church in commemoration
of Thee, my God!
The flaming maw of Mors opening a Day!

Notes

Mors is a Roman god of death and counterpart to Thanatos (not to be confused with Mars, the Roman god of war).

CRY OF THE NEEDY

Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky;* previously unpublished.

The apical qualitied sun
dips in chocolate splendors of icy evening
its cone of day,
as hedonic swallows of gland
word in lamp revival
the Christian and vampiric throat.

Notes

Hedonic refers to pleasure. This poem is one of Zelazny's contributions to the canon of the Undead.

COME BACK TO THE KILLING GROUND, ALICE, MY LOVE

Amazing Stories, August 1992.
#7 on 1993 Locus poll (novelette)
§ *Kalifriki*

1

All the death-traps in the galaxy, and she has to walk into mine. At first I didn't recognize her. And when I did I knew it still couldn't be right, her, there, with her blindfolded companion in the sandals and dark kimono. She was dead, the octad broken. There couldn't be another. Certain misgivings arose concerning this one. But I had no choice. Does one ever? There are things to do. Soon she will move. I will taste their spirits.

Play it again, Alices…

2

She came to him at his villa in Constantinople, where, in loose-fitting garments, trowel in hand, spatulate knife at belt, he was kneeling amid flowers, tending one of his gardens. A servant announced her arrival.

"Master, there is a lady at the gate," the old man told him, in Arabic.

"And who could that be?" the gardener mused, in the same tongue.

"She gave her name as Alyss," the servant replied, and added, "She speaks Greek with a foreign accent."

"Did you recognize the accent?"

"No. But she asked for you by name."

"I should hope so. One seldom calls on strangers for any good purpose."

"Not the Stassinopoulos name. She asked for Kalifriki."

"Oh, my. Business," he said, rising and passing the trowel to the man, dusting himself off. "It's been a long time."

"I suppose it has, Sir."

"Take her to the lesser courtyard, seat her in the shade, bring her tea, sherbet, melons—anything else she may desire. Tell her I'll be with her shortly."

"Yes, Sir."

Repairing within, the gardener removed his shirt and bathed quickly, closing his dark eyes as he splashed water over his high cheekbones, then his chest, his arms. After drying, he bound his dark hair with a strip of golden cloth, located an embroidered white shirt with full sleeves within his wardrobe, donned it.

In the courtyard at a table beside the fountain, where a mosaic of dolphins sported beneath the waters which trickled in small rivers from a man-sized Mt. Olympus, he bowed to the expressionless lady who had studied his approach. She rose slowly to her feet. Not tall, he observed, a full head shorter than himself, dark hair streaked with white, eyes very blue. A pale scar crossed her left cheek, vanished into the hair above her ear.

"Alyss, I believe?" he inquired, as she took his hand and raised it to her lips.

"Yes," she replied, lowering it. "Alice." She gave it a slightly different accenting than his man had done.

"That's all?"

"It is sufficient for my purposes, sir." He did not recognize her accent either, which annoyed him considerably.

He smiled and took the chair across from her as she reseated herself. He saw that her gaze was fixed upon the small star-shaped scar beside his right eye.

"Verifying a description?" he inquired as he poured himself a cup of tea.

"Would you be so kind as to let me see your left wrist?" she asked.

He shook back the sleeve. Her gaze fell almost greedily upon the red thread that was wrapped about it.

"You are the one," she said solemnly.

"Perhaps," he replied, sipping the tea. "You are younger than you would have your appearance indicate."

She nodded. "Older, also," she said.

"Have some of the sherbet," he invited, spooning two dishfuls from the bowl. "It's quite good."

3

I steady the dot. I touch the siphon and the bone. There, beyond the polished brass mirror, sipping something cool, her remarking in Greek that the day is warm, that it was good to find a shaded pausing place such as this caravanserai, my doorstep, in which to refresh themselves—this does not deceive me in its calculated nonchalance. When they have finished and risen, they will not head back to the street with its camels, dust, horses, cries of the vendors, I know that. They will turn, as if inadvertently, in the direction of this mirror. Her and the monk. Dead ladies, bear witness…

4

"I can afford you," she told him, reaching for a soft leather bag on the flagging beside her chair.

"You precede yourself," he responded. "First I must understand what it is that you want of me."

She fixed him with her blue gaze and he felt the familiar chill of the nearness of death.

"You kill," she said simply, "Anything, if the price is right. That is what I was told."

He finished his tea, refilled their clips.

"I choose the jobs I will accept," he said. "I do not take on everything that is thrust at me."

"What considerations govern your choices?" she asked.

"I seldom slay the innocent," he replied, "by my definitions of innocence. Certain political situations might repel me—"

"An assassin with a conscience," she remarked.

"In a broad sense, yes."

"Anything else?"

"Madam, I am something of a last resort," he responded, "which is why my services are dear. Any simple cutthroat will suffice for much of what people want done in this area. I can recommend several competent individuals."

"In other words, you prefer the complicated ones, those offering a challenge to your skills?"

" 'Prefer' is perhaps the wrong word. I am not certain what is the right one—at least in the Greek language. I do tend to find myself in situations, though, as the higher-priced jobs seem to fall into that category, and those are normally the only ones I accept."

She smiled for the first time that morning, a small, bleak thing.

"It falls into that category," she said, "in that no one ever succeeded in such an undertaking as I require. As for innocence you will find none here. And the politics need be of no concern, for they are not of this world."

She nibbled a piece of melon.

"You have interested me," he said.

5

At last, they rise. The monk adjusts the small bow he bears and places his hand upon her shoulder. They cross the refreshment area. They are leaving! No! Could I have been wrong? I realize suddenly that I had wanted it to be her. That part of me I had thought fully absorbed and transformed is suddenly risen, seeks to command. I desire to cry out. Whether it be "Come!" or "Run!" I do not know. Yet neither matters. Not when it is not a part of her. Not when they are departing.

But.

At the threshold, she halts, saying something to her companion. I hear only the word "hair."

When she turns back there is a comb in her hand. She moves suddenly toward the dot manifestation which hangs brightly upon the wall to her right. As she drops her veil and adjusts her red tresses I become aware that the color is unnatural.

6

"Not of this world," he repeated. "Whence, then, may I inquire?"

"Another planet, far across the galaxy from here," she replied. "Do these terms mean anything to you?"

"Yes," he answered. "Quite a bit. Why have you come?"

"Pursuit," she said.

"Of the one you would have me slay?"

"At first it was not destruction but rescue that we sought."

" 'We'?"

"It took eight of me to power the devices which brought us here, an original and seven copies. Clones."

"I understand."

"Really? Are you, yourself, alien to this place?"

"Your story is the important one just now. You say there are eight of you about?"

She shook her head.

"I am the last," she stated. "The other seven perished in attempting the task I must complete."

"Which are you, the original or a clone?"

She laughed. Then, abruptly, her eyes were moist, and she turned away.

"I am a copy," she said, at length.

"And you still live," he remarked.

"It is not that I did not try, I went in after all of the others failed. I failed, too. I was badly injured. But I managed to escape—barely."

"How long ago was this?"

"Almost five years."

"A long time for a copy to stay alive."

"You know?"

"I know that many Cultures which employ clones for a particular job tend to build in some measure against their continued existence once the job is done, a kind of insurance against the...embarrassment...of the original."

"Or the replacement, yes. A small poison sac at the base of the skull in my case. I believe my head injury did something to nullify its operation."

She turned her head and raised her hair. There were more scars upon her neck.

"He thinks I am dead," she went on. "I am certain. Either from the encounter or from the passage of time. But I know the way in, and I learned something of the place's rules."

"I think you had better tell me about this person and this place," Kalifriki said.

7

The Alices are singing their wordless plaint. Now and forever. I build another wall, rings set within it, chains threaded through them. For all of them. Come back, come back, Alice, my last. It is you. It must be. Make the movement that will commit you, that will transport you. Else must I reach forth the siphon, as I have so many times. Even if it be not you, I must know. You resurrect an older self.

"Good," she says, putting away her comb, turning toward the door.

No!

Then she turns back, lips set in a tight line, raising her hand, touching the reflecting surface. A moment, as she locates the pulses, passes her hand through the activation sequence.

As her fingers penetrate the interface the bowman is suddenly behind her, laying his hand upon her shoulder. No matter. He may bear an interesting story within him.

8

"Aidon," she said. "He is Aidon."

"The one you seek?" Kalifriki asked. "The one you would have me kill?"

"Yes," she said. Then, "No. We must go to a special place," she finished.

"I don't understand," he said, "What place?"

"Aidon."

"is Aidon the name of a man or the name of a place?"

"Both," she said. "Neither."

"I have studied with Zen masters and with Sufi sages," he said, "but I can make no sense of what you are saying. What is Aidon?"

"Aidon is an intelligent being. Aidon is also a place. Aidon is not entirely a man. Aidon is not such a place as places are in this world."

"Ah," he said. "Aidon is an artificial intelligence, a construct."

"Yes," she said. "No."

"I will stop asking questions," he stated, "for now. Just tell me about Aidon."

She nodded once, sharply.

"When we came to this system looking for Nelsor," she began, "the ship's instruments showed that something on this planet had gained control of a cosmic string, circumnavigating the universe, present since its creation. We dismissed this at the time, for it was actually one of the tiny holes of blackness—an object supercollapsed to an unworldly point, also present since the creation—that we were seeking. For this would lead us to Nelsor's vessel, from which a damage-pulse had come to us. We use the black objects to power our way through other spaces. Do you understand?"

"That part, yes," he said. "I don't understand who or what Nelsor is, let alone Aidon."

"They are the same," she said, "now. Nelsor was her—the original Alice's—lover, mate, consort, husband-relation. He piloted the vessel which had the trouble, and they came down in this general area of your planet. I believe that Aidon took control of the vessel—and of Nelsor as well—and caused the landing here, and that this is what triggered the damage-pulse."

She glanced at him.

"Aidon," she said, "is difficult to explain. Aidon began as one of those small, black, collapsed objects which make a hole in space. We use them as specialized devices. Bypassing space for distant travel is one of the ends for which they are employed. They are set up for most of their jobs—travel included—by swirling a field of particles about them at high velocity. These fields are impressed with considerable data for the jobs they are to perform. The field is refreshed at its outer perimeter, and the data is replicated and transferred outward in waves as the inner perimeter is absorbed. So there is a matching informed particle-feed to equal the interior information loss. The device draws on the radiation from the collapsed object for power and is programmed to be self-regulating in this regard."

"I understand what you are saying," Kalifriki replied, "and possibly even where this is going now. Such a thing becomes intelligent—sentient?"

"Generally. And normally their input is well controlled," she answered.

"But not always?"

She smiled, momentarily. Kalifriki poured more tea.

"Of all categories of employment, there is less control over the input of those used in space travel," she responded, "and I suppose that the very act of traversing the peculiar domains they must has its odd results. The experts are not in agreement on this. One thing which definitely affects such a construct, however, is that for certain areas of space passage the pilot must maintain constant direct communication with it. This requires a special sort of person for pilot, one possessing the ability to reach it mentally—a telepathic individual with special training for working with constructed intelligences. Such a relationship will infect the construct to some extent with the operator's personality."

She paused for a drink of tea.

Then, "Sometimes such constructs become disordered, perhaps from staring too long into the heart of darkness between the stars. In a human we would call it madness. The vessels often simply vanish when this happens. Other times, if it occurs in known space there may be a signature pulse indicating the vehicle's destruction. As with Aidon, they may digest their operators' minds first—an overlay that could enhance the madness to a kind of schizophrenia."

"So Aidon ate Nelsor," said Kalifriki, raising his cup, "and brought the vessel to Earth."

She nodded.

"Whatever had grown twisted within him twists whatever it acquires. It twisted Nelsor's feelings for Alice. He destroyed the four Alices one by one, so that he might know them in their pain. For this is how he learned love, as a kind of pain, from the twistings of darkness that damaged him, to the pain of Nelsor's passing. Not totally alien, perhaps, for there are people who love through pain, also."

Kalifriki nodded.

"But how do you know that this is the case with Aidon?" he asked.

"Alice was also a pilot," she said, "and as such, a sensitive. She had a strong bond of this sort with Nelsor. All of her clones shared her ability. When she brought the final three of us and came seeking him—for he seemed still alive, but somehow changed—this was the means by which we located the entrance to the blister universe he had created."

"He has his own world?"

"Yes. He formed it and retreated to it quickly after coming to this place. And there he dwells, like a trapdoor spider. Alice entered and was destroyed by him. We all felt it happen. Then, one by one, the three of us who remained essayed the passage—each succeeding in penetrating a little farther into the place because of her predecessor's experience. But each of the others was destroyed in the process. I was the last, so I knew the most of how his world operated. It is a kind of slow killing machine, a torture device. I was injured but was able to escape."

She brushed at her scar.

"What could you have hoped to accomplish?" he asked. "Why did you keep going in when you saw what he was up to?"

"We hoped to reach a point where we could communicate with that part of him which is still Nelsor. Then, by linking minds, we had thought to be able to strengthen him to overcome Aidon. We hoped that we could save him."

"I thought he was dead—physically, that is."

"Yes, but in that place, with that power, he would have been godlike, if he could have been freed even briefly and gained control of Aidon again. He might have been able to reconstitute his body and come away in it."

"But..." Kalifriki said.

"Yes. Aidon proved so much stronger than what remained of Nelsor that I saw it could never be. There is no choice now but to destroy Aidon."

"Why not just let him be if he's retreated to his own universe?"

"I can hear their cries—Nelsor's, and those of the ravished souls of my sisters. There must be some release for what remains of them all. And there are others now. The entrance to his underworld lies hidden in a public house on a trade route. When a sufficiently sensitive individual enters there, Aidon becomes aware of it, and he takes that person to him. He has developed a taste for life stories along with his pain. He extracts them both, in a kind of slow feasting. But there is more. You are aware of the nature of such objects. You must realize that one day he will destroy this world. He leeches off it. Eventually, he will absorb it all. It will hover forever in a jumble of images on his event horizon, but it will be gone."

"You would hire me to destroy a black hole?"

"I would hire you to destroy Aidon."

Kalifriki rose and paced through several turns.

"There are many problems," he said at last.

"Yes," she replied, drinking her tea.

9

...Passing through the mirror into my world, hand emerging from a lake, slim white arm upthrust as if holding the sword in that story the Frenchman had. And hesitation. Coy, her return, as if waiting for me to reach out, to hand her through. Perhaps I shall. There is amusement to be had in this. Come, siphon...

Fading, faded, gone. The arm. She wavered and went out, like a flame in a sudden draft. Gone from beneath the lake, behind the mirror. Along with the blind monk. To what realm transported? Gone from the inn, from my world, also.

But wait...

10

"You are asking me to pit my Thread, in some way, against a singularity," he said.

"How is it that your string resembles a piece of red thread?" she asked.

"I require a visible appearance for it locally," he said, "to have something to work with. I do not like your idea."

"As I understand these things, your Thread goes all the way around the universe. It was this that we detected on our approach. There are fundamental physical reasons why it can never have an end. A singularity could not bite a piece out of it. The antigravity of its pressure would exactly cancel the gravity of the energy. So there would be no net change in the gravity of the black hole which tried to take it in. The hole would not grow in size, and the situation would remain static in that regard. But you would have Aidon hooked with the string passing through him. Could you then transfer him to another universe?"

Kalifriki shook his head.

"No matter what I might do with him that way, the hole would remain permanently attached to the Thread, and that is unacceptable. It might cause unusual loopings. No. I will not match two such fundamental objects directly against each other. If I am to be retained to destroy Aidon I will do it my way, Alice. Aidon, as I understand it, is not really the black hole itself, but a self sustaining, programmed accretion disc which has suffered irreparable damage to its information field. That could be the point of my attack."

"I don't see how you would proceed with it."

"I see only one way, but it would mean that you would not be able to return to your home world."

She laughed.

"I came here prepared to die in this enterprise," she said. "But, since the black hole cannot be destroyed and you will not attempt shifting it to another universe, I need to know what your attack will involve—as further disruption of the information will involve Nelsor as well as Aidon."

"Oh? You said you'd given up on Nelsor, that what was left of him was ruined and merged with Aidon, that the only course remaining was to destroy the entire construct."

"Yes, but your talk of my not returning home implied that you wanted my ship or something from it. That could only be its singularity drive."

"You're right."

"So you intend somehow to use one black hole against the other. And it could work. Such a sudden increase in mass without a compensating acceleration of the field could result in its absorbing the field faster than the field could replicate itself. You would make the hole eat Aidon and Nelsor both."

"Correct."

"I don't see how you could get close enough to do it. But that is, as you say, your problem. I might be able to penetrate Aidon's world to a point where I could communicate with Nelsor mentally and make a final effort to save him, to complete my mission. I want you to hold off on doing what you contemplate until I've tried."

"That would narrow our safety margin considerably. Why this sudden change of heart?"

"It was because I saw the possibility when I began to understand your plan. Bringing another singularity into that place might perturb Aidon to the point where he may lose some control over what he holds of Nelsor. If there is any chance he might still be freed...I must try, though I be but an image of his lady. Also, my telepathic bond with him may be stronger than that of any of the other six."

"Why is that?" Kalifriki asked.

She reddened and looked away. She raised her cup and lowered it again without drinking.

"Nelsor took no sexual pleasure with the clones," she said, "only with the original Alice. One time, however, I was in her quarters seeking some navigational notes we had discussed while she was occupied in another part of the vessel. He came seeking her and mistook me for his lady. He had been working hard and I felt sorry for him in his need for release. So I assumed her role and let him use me as he would her, giving him what pleasure I could. We enjoyed each other, and he whispered endearments and later he went away to work again. It was never discovered, and I've never spoken of it till now. But I have heard that such things can strengthen the bond."

"So you care for him in a somewhat different way than the others," Kalifriki said, "as he did for you, whatever the circumstances."

"Yes," she replied, "for I am her equal in all ways, not just genetically, having known him as the other six did not."

"So you would undertake an even greater risk for him?"

"I would."

"And if you fail?"

"I'd still want you to destroy him, for mercy's sake."

"And if you succeed, and the world is coming apart about us? It may be harder to escape under those circumstances. I don't really know."

She reached for her bag.

"I brought all the gold bars I could carry comfortably. There are a great many more aboard my vessel. I'll give them all to you—"

"Where is your vessel?"

"Beneath the Sea of Marmara. I could summon it, but it were better to go out in a boat and simply raise it for a time."

"Let me see how much gold you have in the sack."

She hefted it and passed it to him.

"You're stronger than you look," he said as he accepted it. He opened it then and examined its contents. "Good," he said. "But we will need more than this."

"I told you you can have it all. We can go and get it now."

"It would not be for me, but for the purchase of equipment," he told her. "This bag and another like it should suffice for that, if I take the job."

"There will still be ample metal left for your fee," she said. "Much more than this. You *will* take the job, won't you?"

"Yes, I will."

She was on her feet.

"I will get you the gold now. When can we leave for Ubar?"

"Ubar? That is where Aidon has opened his office?"

"Yes. It lies near an Arabian trade route."

"I know the place. We cannot go there immediately, however. First, there are preparations to be made."

"Who are you really?" she asked him. "You know too much. More than the culture of this world contains."

"My story is not part of the bargain," he said. "You may rest now. My servant will show you to a suite. Dine with me this evening. There are more details that I wish to know concerning Aidon's world. Tomorrow I would inspect your vessel and obtain the additional gold we will need for a trip we must take."

"Not to Ubar?"

"To India, where I would obtain a certain diamond of which I have heard, of a certain perfection and a certain shape."

"That will be a long journey."

"Not really. Not as I shall conduct it."

"By some employment of the string? You can do that?" He nodded. "How did you gain such control over a thing like that?"

"As you said, Alice, I know too much."

11

. . . But wait. Now they are back. Her arm still extends above the waters of my lake. Likely but some trick of the interface, some roving particle's hit within the microcircuitry, that fogged the transfer. They come now into my world, wet white garment clinging to the well-remembered contours of her form—nipples above their orbs, curves of hip and back and buttocks, shoulders, thighs—ripe for the delicate raking of claws. And the man, he is more muscular than first I thought. A lover, then, perhaps. Then to see those muscles flex when the skin has been removed to the waist...there is that to fill the air with the music of outcry and weeping. Dead Alices, give them a song as they come ashore, of welcome to their new home, through crystal forest beneath a sky of perfect blue. How long from that then to this now? Centuries. As entropy here rockets to the sharp curves of my architecture, the contours of its form rake of my desire. The arrow of time passes and returns down sharp geodesics, pierces memory to the rage, impales rage that the love may flow. Why did you come back, form of hatred and its opposite? You will tell me, upon the ground I have prepared for you, tell, to the chorus of your sisters beneath a bleeding sky. But we must not rush these things, Alice, my last. For when you are done the ages will be long, the glory of your exposed architecture a piece of frozen time, distributed in monument about the crying landscape. Come back to the Killing Ground, Alice, my love. I've many a present to gift you there, the entire universe our angel of record against the long dark time. Set foot upon the shore and find your way. The ladies sing your nuptials in the Place of Facing Skulls.

12

Kalifriki dropped the anchor and struck the sails of their boat, as Alice moved to the bow and begin singing in a lilting language he did not understand. The beginning morning's light touched the waves with flecks of gold and a cool breeze stirred her zebra hair upon her shoulder. He leaned against the gunwale and watched her as he listened. After a time the boat rose with a long, slow swell, subsiding only gradually. Her voice went out across the water, vibrated within it, and suddenly her eyes widened, reminding him of one of the Acropolis Maidens, as the water roiled to starboard and a curving, burnished form surfaced there like the back of some great, mysterious sea creature rising to meet the day.

He stirred himself, fetching a pole with a hook affixed to its end to grapple them closer to the bronzed surfaces. He glanced back at her before he used it, and she nodded. Reaching then, he caught it within one of the stair-like projections which had rippled into being upon its side, leading up to a hatch. He drew them nearer until he felt the scraping of their hull upon metal.

"Grown, not fabricated," he remarked.

"Yes," she replied, moving forward.

He held the grapple until she had crossed over to the alien vessel's companionway. Then he set it aside and followed.

By the time he came up behind her she had the hatch open. She entered and he looked down in to a lighted interior, down to a soft green deck which might be covered with tailored grasses, furniture built into niches in contoured walls without corners.

Entering, he descended. Barely visible scenes flashed across surfaces he passed. A small vibration communicated itself to him, through the floor, through the air. They passed rooms both bright and muted, traversing corridors with windows that seemed to open upon alien landscapes—one, where red, treelike forms scrambled across an ebony landscape beneath a double sun causing him to pause and stare, as if remembering.

At length, she halted before a tan bulkhead, manipulated a hatch set within it, flung it open. Stack upon stack of small golden bars lay within the revealed compartment, gleaming as through a hint of green haze.

"Take all you want," she said.

"I want another bag such as the first, for the transaction of which I spoke," he told her, "and another after that for the first half of my fee. I will claim the final payment when the job is done. But we can collect these on the way out. I wish to view the source of the ship's power now."

"Come this way."

He followed her farther into the vessel's interior, coming at last to a circular chamber where watery visions appeared around the walls, including one of the underside of his boat, off to his right.

"This is the place," Alice said.

Kalifriki did not see what she did, but suddenly the floor became transparent and far beneath his feet it seemed that something pulsed darkly. There came a dizziness and he felt drawn toward the center of the room.

"Open it," he said.

"Move back two paces, first."

He obeyed. Then the floor opened before him, the section where he had been standing dropping to become three steps leading down to a narrow well. Its forward wall housed a clear compartment within which he seemed to feel the presence of something drawing him. He descended the steps.

"What are the dangers? What are the safeguards?" he asked.

"You are safe where you are," she answered. "I can open the panel and give you a closer look."

"Go ahead."

It slid back and he stared for a moment.

"How would you manipulate it?" he asked.

"Forcefield pressures against its container," she replied.

He shook out a strand of the Thread from his wrist, snaked it about the opening several times, withdrawing it slowly on each occasion.

"All right, I can work with this," he said a little later. "Seal it in again."

The compartment closed before him.

"...Pure carbon crystal lattice, antigrav field webbed throughout," he said as to himself. "Yes. I saw something like this managed once, a long time ago." He turned and mounted the stair. "Let's go in and get the gold. Then we can head back."

They withdrew the way they had come in, returning to the boat with two heavy sacks. The vessel's hatch secured, she sang it back beneath the waves. The sun stood now fully risen, and birds dipped toward the waters about them as he weighed the anchor and set the sails.

"Now?" she said.

"Breakfast," he replied.

"Then?" she asked.

"India," he said.

13

Now the monk has fully entered my world, following her. Suddenly, things are no longer as they have been. Things are no longer right. Things seem to collapse like strange wave functions about him as he passes. Yet nothing seems really changed. What has he brought with him into my world, that I feet uneasy at his presence here? Is it a kind of turbulence? Is it that I am spinning faster? It would be hard to tell if my spin state were affected. Where did she find him? Why did she bring him? An aged tree reaches the end of its growth and shatters as he goes by it. I do not believe I like this man, shuffling unseeing through my gardens of crystal and stone. Yet perhaps I shall like him a great deal when the time comes. Such feelings are often close akin. In the meantime, it is always amusing to observe when a new thing comes to this place. My *arbor decapitant* awaits, but fifty paces ahead. She knows of it, of course. All of the Alices learned of it, the first the hard way. Yet it is good sport to see such things do their business. Yes, he will be all right. New blood must be brought to the game from time to time, else there is no bite to it. I will let them play through, to the end of her knowledge…

14

In Maharajah Alamkara's palace of white marble they were feasted and entertained with music and dance, for Kalifriki had once done some work for that ruler involving a phantom tiger and some missing members of the royal family. Late into the evening a storyteller regaled them with an almost unrecognizable version of the event.

The following day, as Kalifriki and Alice walked amid walls of roses in the royal gardens, the chamberlain, Rasa, sent for them to discuss the business to which Kalifriki had alluded the previous evening.

Seated across the counting table from the heavy dark man of the curled and shiny mustaches, they beheld the stone known as the Dagger of Rama, displayed on a folded black cloth before them. Almost four inches in length, it was broad at the base, tapering upward to a sharp apex; its outline would be that of a somewhat elongated isosceles triangle, save that the lower corners were missing. It was perfectly clear, without a hint of color to it. Kalifriki raised it, breathed upon it. The condensation of his breath vanished immediately. He scrutinized it then through a glass.

"A perfect stone," Rasa said. "You will find no flaws."

Kalifriki continued his examination.

"It may hold up long enough," he said to Alice in Greek, "if I frame it appropriately, using certain properties of the Thread to control external considerations."

"A most lovely stone for your lady to wear between her breasts," Rasa continued. "it is sure to influence the *chakra* of the heart." He smiled then.

Kalifriki placed a bag of gold upon the table, opened it, poured forth its contents.

Rasa picked up one of the small bars and studied it. He scratched it with his dagger's point and measured it, turban bobbing above the gauge. Then he placed it upon a scale he had set up to his left and took its weight.

"Of great purity," he remarked, tossing it back upon the table. Then he raised several of the bars from the pile and let them fall from his hand. "Still, it is not enough for so remarkable a stone. It may well have accompanied Rama on his journey to confront Ravan in the matter of Sita's abduction."

"I am not interested in its history," Kalifriki replied, and he brought up the second bag of gold and added its bars to the heap. "I've heard reports that the tax collectors have had a lean time these past several years."

"Lies!" Rasa stated, opening a nearby chest and dipping his hand into it. He withdrew and cast forth a fistful of semiprecious stones upon the tabletop. Among them lay a small carved mountain of pale green jade, a pathway winding about it in a clockwise direction from base summit. His gaze falling upon this piece, he reached out and tapped it with a thick forefinger. "Sooner would this spiral change direction," he said, "than would I undersell a treasure simply to raise funds."

Kalifriki raised his wrist. The Thread touched upon the piece of jade, seemed to pass within it. The stone moved slightly. The spiral now wound in the opposite direction.

Rasa's eyes widened.

"I had forgotten," he said softly, "that you are the magician who slew the phantom tiger."

"I didn't really kill him," Kalifriki said. "He's still out there somewhere. I just came to terms with him. Storytellers don't know everything."

The man sighed and touched his middle.

"This job is sometimes very trying," he said, "and sometimes seems to give me pains in my stomach. Excuse me."

He removed a small vial from a pouch at his sash, as Kalifriki moved his wrist again. As he unstoppered the container and raised it to his lips, Kalifriki said, "Wait."

Rasa lowered the vial.

"Yes?" he asked.

"If I heal your ulcer," Kalifriki said, "you may well bring it back with too much worry and aggravate it with too many spices. Do you understand?"

"Heal it," he said. "It is hard to cultivate philosophy in the face of necessity, and I do like my foods well seasoned. But I will try."

Kalifriki moved his wrist again and Rasa smiled. He stoppered the vial and replaced it in the pouch.

"All right, magician," he said. "Leave the gold. Take the stone. And if you see the white tiger again, let it know that you pass this way occasionally and that bargains are to be kept."

Later, in the garden at twilight, Alice asked him, "How did you do that reversal on the stone?"

"The full circumference of the Thread is less than 360 degrees," Kalifriki replied. "The negative pressure of antigravity affects the geometry of space about it. Its missing angle is my key to other spaces. I simply rotated the stone through a higher space."

She nodded.

"I seem to recall something of this property from my training," she said. "But how did you heal the ulcer?"

"I speeded up time in its vicinity, letting the natural processes of his body heal it. I hope that he takes my advice and learns some detachment, from his work and his food."

They took a further turn, into an area of the garden they had not yet explored. The bowers seemed to grow flat upon a flattening prospect along the twisting trail they followed. Then they were gone and it was the dead of night with great winnowings of stars blazing above them as they entered the lesser courtyard of Kalifriki's villa at Constantinople.

"You still smell of roses," she said.

"So do you," he replied, "and good night."

15

. . . Walking through my forest, ridiculous archaic weapon upon his back, his hand upon her shoulder, the monk follows the Alice. This one, I note, is scarred. My last Alice, then. She did escape, of course. And gone all this time. Planning, surely. What might she have in mind for the final foray, the last gasp of the octad? Its aim, certainly, is to free Nelsor. Nelsor…Even now, I feel her reaching out toward him. Disturbing. She is the strongest in this regard. Yet soon she will be distracted. They approach my favorite tree. Soon now… It spins in its socket, each limb a saber of glass. But she drops to the ground at precisely the right moment, and her monk moves with her in instant response. They inch their way forward now, the limbs flashing harmlessly, cold fire above them. Yet Endway's Shoot is next, where

I took my second Alice, and the Passage of Moons may take them yet, even aware of the peril. And already she calls again. Nelsor…?

16

Kalifriki sat all the next day in meditation, his bow before him upon the ground. When he had finished he walked on the shore for a long while, watching the waves come in.

Alice met him on his return and they took a late supper together.

"When do you plan to embark for Ubar?" she asked him, after a long silent time.

"Soon," he said, "if all goes well."

"We will visit my vessel in the morning?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"It depends partly on how long the work there takes."

"Partly?"

"I think that I will want to meditate some more afterwards. I do not know how long that will take."

"Whenever…" she answered.

"I know that you are eager," he said later. "But this part must not be rushed."

"I understand."

He walked with her then into the town, passing lighted residences, some shops, government buildings. Many of the sounds of the city had grown still with the darkness, but there was music from some establishments, shouts, laughter, the creaking of a few passing carts, the stamping of horses' feet; they smelled spices in some neighborhoods, perfumes in others, incense from a church.

"What did you do," he asked her, from across a table where they sat sipping a sharp yellow wine, "in the five years between your escape from Aidon and your coming to see me?"

"I traveled," she replied, "seeking you—or someone like you—and trying to find the surface locus of that string. It had seemed bound to this world, as if it were somehow being employed. I supposed that one who had mastered it could be the one I needed to help me in this. I traveled with many servants—with some large male always in charge—as if I were part of a great man's retinue rather than owner of the lot. It is difficult being a woman on this world. I visited Egypt, Athens, Rome, many places. Finally, I heard stories of a man called Kalifriki, who had been employed by Popes, Emperors, Sultans. I traced the stories down. It took a long time, but I could afford to pay for every scrap of information. They led me here."

"Who told you the stories?"

"A poet. He called himself Omar, tentmaker."

"Ali, yes. A good man. Drank too much, though," said Kalifriki, sipping his wine. "And locally?"

"A priest named Basileos."

"Yes. One of my agents. I am surprised he did not warn me."

"I came immediately. I hurried. There was no opportunity for him to beat my arrival with a message. He told me to make further inquiry of Stassinopoulos, but I decided to ask for you here by name instead. I suspected by then that you had a second identity, and I was certain that a man such as yourself would be too curious not to give me audience under the circumstances. I was in a hurry. Five years of hearing their cries has been too long."

"You still hear them, right now?"

"No. Tonight they are silent," she said.

The moon fell down the sky, was caught in the Golden Horn.

17

Now, Nelsor, they have reached the Shoot, a Mountain hurtling by them, but feet above the ground. They must crawl upon their bellies here, and even then, if one of my small satellites whose long ellipse brings it by here has so rotated that some downward projection rakes the land—*quish*! A pair of stepped-on cockroaches. Too fast? True. But this is but the foreplay, dear companion, my mentor. She calls to you again. Do you hear her? Do you wish to answer her? Can you? Ah! another rock and a jagged beauty it is!—races its purple shadow above the blood-red way. By them. And still they crawl. No matter. There will be more.

18

They completed the transfer on the Sea of Marmara that morning and afternoon. Then Kalifriki, clad in brown kimono and sandals, meditated for a brief time. At some point his hand went forward to take hold of the bow. Bearing it with him, he walked away from his villa down toward the sea. Alice, glimpsing his passage from her window, followed him at a distance. She saw him walk upon the shore, then halt, take forth a cloth and bind his eyes with it. He braced the bow, removed an arrow from its case, set it against the string. Then he stood holding them, unmoving.

Minutes passed on toward the end of day and he did not stir. A gull flew near, screaming. The better part of an hour went by. Then another gull passed. Kalifriki raised the bow almost casually, drew it, released the arrow into the air. It passed beside the bird and a single feather came loose, drifted downward.

He removed the cloth from his eyes and watched the feather rock its way to the water. She wanted to sing, but she only smiled.

Kalifriki turned then and waved to her.

"We leave for Ubar in the morning," he called out.

"Did you want the bird or the feather?" she asked, as they walked toward each other.

"To eat the bird is not to digest its flight," he replied.

19

They have passed Endway's Shoot, where my moons flow like a string of bright beads. Leaving the passage like a trail of blood behind them, they rise, turning sharply to the left, climbing to the yellow ridge that will take them down into the valley where they must pass through my Garden of Frozen Beings, the place where I collected my third Alice…What is that? A question? A chuckle?

Nelsor? Do you stir? Would you enjoy a ticket to this final festival? Why, then you shall have one, if you be able to use it. I have not felt such enthusiasm from you in ages. Come then to me if you can. I touch the bone, your skull. I summon you, lord, my mentor, to this place and time, Nelsor, for you were always my master in the matter of killing Alices. It is fitting that you be present when the collection is made complete. Come to me now, Nelsor, out of darkness. This spectacle is yours. By bone, siphon, and dot, I summon you! Come!

20

They came to Ubar, city of Shaddad ibn Ad, to be called Iram in the Koran, oasis town of lofty pillars, "the like of which were not produced in the land." Alice's hair was red now, and she wore a white garment and a light veil upon her face; Kalifriki had on his kimono and sandals, a cloth about his eyes, his bow upon his back, lacquered case beside it containing a single arrow.

Passing amid a sea of tents, they made their way down avenues lined with merchants, traders, beggars, to the sound of camel bells, gusts of wind, and the rattle of palm fronds. Conversation, song, and invective sounded about them in a double-dozen tongues. They came at last to the great gated pillars through which they passed, entering into the town proper, where the splashing sounds of fountains came to them from within adobe walled gardens; and white-stuccoed buildings gleamed in the morning sun, bands of blue, green, red, and yellow tiles adorning their palace-high walls.

"I seem to recall the dining area of the inn as being located in a kind of grotto," Kalifriki said, "within a rocky hillside, with the rest of the establishment constructed right, left, and forward of it, using the face of the hillside as a rear wall."

"That is correct," she said. "The cavern keeps the place cool by day. The cooking fires are well vented to the rear. You descend four or five stone steps on entering, bearing to the right—"

"Where is the mirror located?"

"On the wall to the left as you go in, below the steps."

"Metal, isn't it?"

"Brass or bronze—I forget."

"Then let us go in, be seated, have a cooling drink, and make certain that everything is still this way. On the way out, pause and investigate the mirror as you pretend to study your appearance. Lower the veil as you do so. If it attempts to draw you through, I will be near enough for you to take my hand. If it does not, turn away as if you are about to depart. Then return, as in afterthought, and employ that transport sequence you learned from your predecessors."

"Yes. There is the place up ahead now," she said.

He followed, and she took him in.

21

See, Nelsor? They are at the Garden of Frozen Beings now, place of your own design, if you recall—though in your original plan it was only for display. I came across it in an odd memory cache. See how cunningly it is wrought? It holds your studies of living things from a dozen worlds, in all sizes and colors, set upon many levels, in many interesting poses. Impossible not to pass among several at any given time. I added the Series Perilous.

I took an Alice here, crushed by the blue spiral, eighth from the left where she lay long in two pieces, gasping—for not calculating the death sequence correctly; and one back at Endway's Shoot, smeared to a long streak, though barely noticeable upon the red-stone, and another well flayed and diced in the crystal forest, by my *arbor decapitant.*

The first three, which you managed yourself—before your second disorientation—were so much more elegantly done...

22

Finishing their drinks, Kalifriki and Alice rose and crossed the refreshment area. They passed the metal mirror and mounted the steps. At the threshold, she paused.

"A moment," she said. "I want to check my hair in that mirror we passed."

Returning down the stair, she produced a comb. At the mirror, she made a quick adjustment of several stray tresses, letting her veil fall as she did so.

Kalifriki stood behind her. "We must be at least partway entered before I shift," he whispered, "if I am to lay the Thread in that universe so as to benefit our course through it. Remember what I said of the phenomenon. Whenever you are ready..."

"Good," she said, putting away her comb, turning toward the door.

Three beats later she turned back, lips set in a tight line, raising her hand, touching upon the reflecting surface. After a moment she located the pulses, passed her hand through the activation sequence.

As her fingers penetrated the interface, Kalifriki, behind her, placed his hand upon her shoulder, following a small squeeze from her free hand.

Her entire arm passed through the interface, and Kalifriki took them to the Valley of Frozen Time, where he removed his blindfold. He regarded the Thread's passage through the placeless time into the timeless place, its twistings were complicated, the nexuses of menace manifold. Alice tried to speak to him, not knowing that words, like wind or music, could not manifest in this place of sculpture, painting, map. Twisting the Thread, he flicked it three times, to see it settle at last into the most appropriate bessel functions he could manage under the circumstances, racing ahead to meet himself down thoroughfares of worlds-yet-to-be, and even as it plied its bright way he felt the tug of Time Thawing, replaced his blindfold, and set his hand again upon Alice's shoulder, to feel them drawn back to the waters of a small lake in the toy universe of the collector of Alices, piecemeal, who must even now be wondering at their interrupted passage.

23

Good of you to have summoned me back to my world, Aidon. What have you done to it? What are these silly games you have been about? Aidon, Aidon…Is this how you read my intention? Did you really think the bitches worth the concerted efforts of an entire universe, to crush them in manners you found esthetically gratifying? Did you think I wanted to construct a theme amusement park? You profane the memory of the woman I love. You should have taken instruction from my disposition of the first three. There was a point to those—a very important point. One which you have been neglecting.

Lord, Nelsor, master, my mentor. I am sorry if the program is faulty. I had it that the killing of Alices was the highest value in the universe, as taken from your own example. See! See how this one must scramble, to avoid the hanging twar*? She has generalized the experience of two of her sisters, to learn it is not the* twar *nor the* twar*'s physical position that matters, but rather that position in the sequence of encounters. She had to abstract the series from the previous deaths. See how she must scramble—and her companion after her—to dodge the falling* frogbart, *leap high above the lower limb of the* gride*? When the* bropples *rolled around them she knew just how to dive—and to stand perfectly still till the* wonjit *exhausted its energies. See where the* jankel *has cut her arm? And even now she must pass the way of the* vum. *There is fine sport in her gasping, her bleeding, the tearing of her garments, in seeing the sweat pour from her. And the* slyth *yet remains, and the* fangrace-pair. *Tell me how this differs from the doomed races where you ran the earlier Alices. How have I mistaken your intent? When you ceased being able to function, I was proud to take on your role. I am sorry if—*

Aidon, it broke me to do as I did with the first three. I retreated into my second madness over my actions, still unsatisfied, worse than unsatisfied, actually. I hated them, true, and it made it easier to do what I had to, to learn certain things. Still, it hurt me, also, especially in that I did not learn what I wished, though it narrowed the field. You should have summoned me for the fourth, the fifth, the sixth. There was data that I required there—lost to me now!

Not so, lord! For I recorded them! You can summon them! Have them back! Deal with them further! I have done it many times—for practice. I even bring in outsiders for fresh rites. I have performed the ritual of the dying Alices over and over in your name—hoping to effect your repair in *the reenactment. I have been faithful to your procedure—What? You have not employed that command mode since ship-time... You would retire me? Do not! There is an important thing I have yet to tell you! I—*

Go away, Aidon. Go away. I would rid myself of your bumbling presence, for you have offended me. Let us say that it was an honest mistake. Still, I no longer wish to have you about, chortling over my undertakings, misreading all my actions, distracting me with your apologies. Before you fade entirely, see how I dismantle your remaining stations of blood. It is not games that *I* desire of the scarred lady I hate. But you are right in one thing. I will have the others back, as you recorded them, messy though the prospect be. She will follow the Thread of a new course to the Place of Facing Skulls. By dot, bone, and siphon, this one will give me what I want. Go away, Aidon. Go away.

Come back to the Killing Ground, Alice, my last. The rules you've learned no longer apply. Keep calling to me. You shall have my answer, a piece at a time.

24

Provoking the *fangrace-pair* to attack simultaneously, Alice left them tangled in each other's many limbs. Passing behind the nearer then, she led Kalifriki to a narrow bridge which took them above a canyon whose bottom was lost in blackness. Achieving its farther side, she took him down a twisting way beneath an evening sky of dark blue wherein lights that were not stars burned unblinking at near distances. Vivid, against the darkness, an incandescent rainbow took form.

"Strange," she muttered.

"What?" Kalifriki asked.

"There was never a rainbow here before."

"And it is night, is it not?" Kalifriki asked.

"Yes. It began darkening as we entered that last place."

"In some traditions on Earth a rainbow is the sign of a new covenant," Kalifriki said.

"If that is the message, it is more cryptic than communicative," she said.

Suddenly, the faint sounds of female voices which had been with them constantly since their arrival rose in volume. From sighs to wailings, they had been shaped somehow into a slow, eerie tune which rose and fell as if working toward an ominous crescendo it never quite reached, returning constantly to begin again, yet another variation on plaints of pain, punctuated with staccato bursts of hysterical laughter.

A cool wind came by, gusting among the high rocks amid which they moved. On several occasions, the ground shook beneath their feet.

Reaching the end of their downward way and turning to the left, Alice beheld a deep crater in which a lake of orange lava boiled, flames darting above it, casting its light upon the high, piped walls which surrounded it. Their trail split here, an arm of it going in either direction about the lake's oval perimeter, cinder-strewn between its jagged shores and the rise of the organpipe walls.

Alice halted.

"What is the matter?" Kalifriki asked.

"A burning lake," she said. "It wasn't here before."

"What was?"

"A maze, full of pits and deadfalls, flooded periodically with rushing torrents."

"What now?"

"I suppose we must choose a way and go on, to find the place of which I told you that first night over dinner—the place we have glimpsed but never quite reached. There are bones there, and an open wall. I think it is the place of the Singularity. Which way should I go?"

"Let us trust to the falling of the Thread. Find a random way to choose."

She stooped and picked up a pebble. Turning, she cast it, hard, back in the direction from which they had come. It struck against the rock wall and bounded back. It rolled past them to the right.

"Right," she said, and they turned and took up their way again, in that direction.

The trail was perhaps six feet in width, light from the blazing cauldron to their left casting their shadows grotesquely upon the fluted wall. The way curved in and out as they went; and they felt the heat—painfully, after a time—upon their left sides. Dark fumes obscured the starlike lights in the sky, though the rainbow still glowed brightly. The chorus of pained voices was partly muted by the popping and crackling from below, by the faint roaring that came in undertone.

As they rounded a bend they heard a moaning.

"Alice..." came a soft call from the right.

She halted.

Bleeding from countless cuts, one leg missing from below the knee, the other from above it, left arm dangling by a thread of flesh, a woman who resembled her lay upon a low ledge to the right, face twisted in the orange glow, her remaining eye focused upon them.

"Alice—don't—go—on," she gasped. "It—is—awful. Kill me—quickly—please..."

"What happened? What did this to you?" Alice asked.

"The tree—tree of glass—by the lake."

"But that is far. How did you get here?"

"Don't know," came the reply. "Why is it—so? What have we done?"

"I don't know."

"Kill me."

"I cannot."

"Please..."

Kalifriki moved forward. Alice did not see what he did. But she knew, and the broken lady did not call to them again.

They passed on in silence then, the lake growing more turbulent as they moved, now shooting great fountains of fire and molten material high into the air. The heat and fumes grew more oppressive. Periodically, niches glowed again in the wall to their right, wherein bleeding Alices stood, eyes staring, unseeing, straight ahead, lips twisting in their song which rose in intensity now, overcoming the lake's roaring. Whenever they approached these figures, however, they faded, though the song remained.

Then, in the flaring light, as they neared the far end of the trail, Alice beheld a rough area amid the cinders and congealed slag. She slowed, as she realized that the mangled remains of a human body were smeared before her, still somehow stirring. She halted when she saw the half-crushed head beside the way.

Its lips moved, and a wavery voice said, "Give him what he wants, that I may know peace."

"What—What is it that he wants?" she asked.

"You know," it gasped. "You know. Tell him!"

Then the lake bubbled and roared more loudly. A great strand of flame and lava leaped above it and fell toward them. Alice retreated quickly, pushing Kalifriki backward behind her. The fiery mass fell across the trail, obliterating the remains, draining, fuming, back into the lake. When it was gone, the ground smoking before them, the remains of the dead Alice had vanished, also.

They halted, waiting for the way to cool, and Kalifriki asked, "What is this knowledge of which she spoke?"

"I—I'm not certain," Alice replied.

"I've a feeling," Kalifriki said, "the question will be repeated in more specific and equally colorful terms at some point."

"I'd guess you're right," she told him.

Shortly, they walked on, treading quickly across the ravaged area, beneath the rainbow, the song suddenly reaching a higher pitch of wailing as they went.

As they neared the farther end of the lake, another molten spume reached near at hand. Alice halted, waiting to see in which direction the flashing tower might topple. But it stood, swaying, for a long while, almost as if trying to decide the matter itself. It took on a spiraling twist for a while before abruptly falling toward the wall perhaps twenty paces ahead of them.

They retreated even farther as this occurred. The spume fell in slow motion above the trail, its tip touching the wall, whence it flowed downward to the right hand trail's edge. Its upper portion remained in place, ten or twelve feet overhead, spirals working through it in two directions, braiding themselves now into a sputtering yellow-orange fretwork of light and molten material. The archway thus formed ceased its swaying and stood pulsing before them.

"We suddenly have a burning gate ahead of us," Alice stated.

"Is there any other way to proceed?" Kalifriki asked.

"No," she said.

"Then it would seem we have little choice."

"True. I just wanted you to know the nature of this encounter."

"Thank you. I am ready."

They moved ahead, and the archway maintained its position as they approached. Passing beneath it, the air was filled with crackling sounds and the prospect wavered. Alice's next step took her onto a rough silvery way with nothing about her but the starlike lights. Another pace, and Kalifriki had passed through also, the gateway vanishing behind him.

It was not a continuous surface upon which they stood, but rather a forty-foot span of about the same width as the trail they had quitted. It ended abruptly in all directions. Looking downward over its edge, she saw, at a distance impossible to estimate, the twisted surface of the land they had been traversing, cracked, pierced, brightly pied, monoliths darting about its surface, the rainbow still arched above it; and even as she watched, it seemed to change shape, lakes flowing into valleys, flames leaping up out of shadows and crests, new jigsaw pieces of color replacing old ones with less than perfect fit. And about them, still, rang the plaints of the dead Alices. She moved ahead, toward the farther end of the silver way.

"We're high above the land," she said, "walking on the surface of a narrow asteroid. It is like a broken-out piece of a bridge. I'm heading toward its farther end."

"Alice," Kalifriki said as they began to move again, "I have a question."

"What is it?"

"Did you come to Earth on the first vessel or the second?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"You said that Nelsor and four clones came here and had their trouble. Then later, his Alice, learning of this, made the voyage with the three remaining clones, yourself among them."

"Did I? I don't recall exactly how I phrased it."

"Then, when you told me of your bedroom encounter with Nelsor, it sounded as if you, he, and the original Alice all made a single journey together."

"Oh. That happened on a different voyage, elsewhere."

"I see," Kalifriki said, matching her pace.

Tenuous wisps of fog swept by them as they walked, followed by larger puffs. Something massive drifted downward from overhead, possibly on a collision course, possibly about to miss them. It was of about the same shape and albedo as the thing on which they moved.

"Another asteroid headed this way," she reported. "A bit of fog's come by, too."

"Let's keep going to the end."

"Yes."

Just as they reached the extremity of their way, the second piece of spanning slid into place before them and remained there, as if joined with their own. This one curved to the left.

"We've acquired an extension," she said. "I'm going to continue along it."

"Do so."

Several additional pieces moved by as they walked—one of them the section they had quitted, removing itself from the rear and drifting forward to join them again ahead.

"It's extending itself down toward a cloud bank," she told him, as she peered in the new direction it was taking. Then, too, they seemed to be moving, relative to the overall form of the shifting panorama below.

She crossed to another section. The clouds came on quickly, they were of soft pink, pale blue, light lime, streaked through each other in delicate abstract waves.

Several hundred paces later she heard a scream. Halting, and looking to the right, whence it seemed to have come, she beheld nothing but clouds. She began to gnaw at her lower lip as the cry was repeated.

"What is it?" Kalifriki asked.

"I don't know."

Then the clouds parted, and she saw a pair of drifting boulders but a few feet distant. The upper torso, head, and shoulders of a woman resembling herself lay sprawled upon the left-hand stone. Severed from these and occupying the slightly lower right-hand one lay the rest of her, twitching.

"Alice!" the figure cried. "He would know which of us was responsible. None of us could tell him. That leaves only you. Tell him what happened, for mercy's sake!"

Then the two rocks flew off in opposite directions and the clouds closed in again. Kalifriki could feel Alice shaking.

"If you know whatever it is he wants," he said, "perhaps you should tell him. It may make life a lot easier."

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," she said. "I suppose I'll learn when I'm asked a direct question. Oh!"

"What? What is it?"

"Nelsor. I reached him for a moment. Or he reached me. He is gone now."

"Could you tell anything about his condition?"

"He seemed a mix of emotions. Happy that I was coming—in some other way disturbed. I don't know."

They walked again. The singing went on, and periodically they could feel the vibrations as new pieces of their twisted passageway through the sky assembled themselves. The colored fogs parted and came together again, flirting with her vision, providing tantalizing glimpses of some vantage that lay far ahead.

Their way seemed telescoped from break to break in their passage through the fog. Suddenly, Alice halted, stiffening, saying "Stop!" sharply.

"What is it?" Kalifriki asked.

"End of the trail, for the moment," she replied. "It just stops here. We are at the edge, and I am looking down again, through a thinning fog, at the distant land. The fog at our sides is dissipating now, too. That which is ahead of us is still thick. A redness flows through it."

They waited, and the red mist passed by degrees, revealing, first, an almost sculpted-seeming rocky prominence, pointed centrally, descending symmetrically at either hand and curving forward into a pair of gray-blue stony shoulders, and before them a flat yellow oval of sandy stone, raised above lesser steplike formations, irregular, more blue than gray, descending into mist. To the rear, set within the bulk of the prominence, a shelf-like niche was recessed at shoulder height; and at the oval's approximate center lay a well, a low wall of red stone blocks about its mouth. Another structured wall—this one of black stone—stood to the far left and downward of the oval, perhaps twenty feet in length, eight in height. Chains hung upon it. And this entire vision seemed to be quivering, as through a heat-haze.

More of the mist blew away, and the lines of the lower slopes came into view. Watching, as the last of it fled, Alice saw that the base of the entire prominence was an abruptly terminated thing, at about twice the height's distance below the oval, jagged blue icicles hanging beneath, as if a frozen mountaintop had been torn loose and hurled into space to hover against the blackness and the unblinking points of light; and now she could see that the rainbow's end lay within the oval.

Despite this clearing, the entire monumental affair still seemed to be vibrating.

"What is it?" Kalifriki asked at last.

Slowly, she began describing it to him.

25

Nelsor, I had only one thing to tell you before, but now I have two. Please acknowledge. There is perturbation within the well of the dot because another singularity is approaching—also a second peculiar item, of energy and negative field pressure trapped within a tube. Please acknowledge. This is a serious matter. I understand now what it was about the monk which first troubled me. Here at the center of things I can feel it clearly. He is very dangerous and should be removed from our universe at once. Release me and I will deal with him immediately. Acknowledge, Nelsor! Acknowledge! There is danger here!

Oh. The other thing I wanted to tell you concerns the first Alice. I had located some small memory caches for her. They were inadvertently recorded because of a peculiar conflict situation. Nelsor, I am going to begin pushing against this retirement program if you do not answer me…

26

Alice stared at the vibrating landscape in the sky. A final span of bridge came drifting in slowly from her right, streaming colors as it passed through the rainbow. The voices of her dead sisters ceased, and only the wind that blows between the worlds could be heard in its chill passage.

"It is called the Killing Ground," she said then. "It has been transferred here from another location since my last visit. It is the final place."

"You never referred to it so before," Kalifriki said.

"I only just learned the name. I have reached Nelsor again. Or he has reached me. He bids me cross over. He says, 'Come back to the Killing Ground, Alice, my last.' "

"I thought you had never been to the final place."

"I told you I had glimpsed it."

As the last piece of bridge slid into place, connecting their span with the lowest step beneath the oval, she saw the vibrations shake loose a small white object from the niche. With a sudden clarity of vision, she discerned it to be a skull. It bounced, then rolled, coming to rest in the sand near a spreading red stain.

"Kalifriki," she said, "I am afraid. He is changed. Everything is changed. I don't want to cross over to that place."

"I don't believe I can get us out at this point," Kalifriki said. "I feel we are bound too tightly to my initial disposition of the Thread, back in the Valley of Frozen Time, to employ it otherwise here. We must pass through whatever lies ahead, or be stopped by it."

"Please make certain," she asked, licking her lips. "He is calling again…"

27

Alice, Alice, Alice. You must be the one. It could have been none of the other wasted ladies. Even if Aidon fumbled in his approach by not putting the questions, there should have been some lapse on their part, some betrayal of the truth, should there not? The guilty one would not even have come in... Why, why are you here at all? And that stranger at your side... What is your plan? If it is you, why are you here? I am troubled. I must put you the questions. Why did you come back, Alice my last? It must be you...mustn't it? And why do you hesitate now? Come back to the Killing Ground, where her blood stains the sand and our skills lie in constant testimony to the crime. Come back. No? Then I call upon the siphon to bear you to me, here in the last place, beside the well of the dot that is the center of the universe. Even now it snakes forth. You *will* come to me, Alice, here and now, on this most holy ground of truth. I reach for you, You cannot resist.

Not now, Aidon. Not now. Go back. Go back. I have retired you. Go back.

It comes for you, Alice.

28

"I am sorry," Kalifriki said. "It is as I told you."

Staring ahead, Alice saw a black line emerge from the well, lash about, grow still, then move again, rising, swaying in her direction, lengthening...

"The siphon," she said. "A piece of ship's equipment. Very versatile. He is sending it for me."

"Is it better to wait for it or go on?"

"I would rather walk than be dragged. Perhaps he will not employ it if I come on my own."

She began moving again. The black hose, which had been approaching, snakelike, halted its advance as she came toward it down the final length of silver. When she came up in front of it, it retreated. Step by step then, it withdrew before her. She hesitated a moment when she came to the end of the span. It leaned slightly toward her. At this, she took another step. It backed off immediately.

"We're here," she said to Kalifriki. "There are several ledges now, like a rough stairway, to climb."

She began mounting them, and as soon as she reached the flat sandy area the siphon withdrew entirely, back into the well. She continued to advance, looking about. She came to the well, halted, and peered down into it.

"We are at the well," she said, and Kalifriki removed his hand from her shoulder and reached down to feel along its wall. "It goes all the way through this asteroid," she continued. "The dot—the black hole—is down there at its center. The siphon is coiled about the inner perimeter, near to the lip. It shrinks, so that one circuit is sufficient to house it. Below, I can see the bright swirling of the disc. It is far down inside—perhaps midway."

"So this place is being eaten, down at its center," Kalifriki said. "I wonder if that is the cause of the vibration?"

She walked on, past the red stain and the skull, to regard the niche from which the skull had tumbled. Another skull rested there, far to the right, and a collection of pincers, tongs, drills, hammers, and chains lay in the middle area.

"Torture tools here," she observed.

Kalifriki, in the meantime, was pacing about the area, touching everything he encountered. Finally, he stopped beside the well. Looking back, Alice saw that the rainbow fell upon his shoulders.

Then, above the sighing of the wind, there came a voice.

"I am going to kill you, Alice," it said. "Very slowly and very terribly."

"Why?" she asked.

The voice seemed to be coming from the vicinity of the skull. It was, as she recalled it, the voice of Nelsor.

"All of the others are dead," he said. "Now it is your turn. Why did you come back?"

"I came here to help you," she said, "if I could."

"Why?" he asked, and the skull turned over so that the empty sockets faced her.

"Because I love you," she replied.

There came a dry chuckling sound.

"How kind of you," he said then. "Let us have a musical accompaniment to that tender sentiment. Alices, give us a song."

Immediately, the awful plaint began again, this time from near at hand. To her right, six nude duplicates of herself suddenly hung in chains upon the black wall. They were bruised but unmutilated. Their eyes did not focus upon any particular objects as they began to shriek and wail. At the end of their line hung a final set of chains.

"When I have done with you, you shall join my chorus," Nelsor's voice went on.

"Done?" she said, raising a pair of pliers from the ledge and replacing it. "Employing things such as this?"

"Of course," he replied.

"I love you, Nelsor."

"That should make it all the more interesting."

"You are mad."

"I don't deny it."

"Could you forget all this and let me help you?"

"Forget? Never. I am in control here. And it is not your love or your help that I seek."

She looked at Kalifriki, and he removed the bow from his shoulder and strung it. Then he opened the case and withdrew its arrow, the spectrum blazing upon its tip.

"If your friend wishes to punch a hole in my head, that is all right with me. It will not let out the evil spirits, though."

"Is it possible for you to reembody yourself and come away with me?" she asked.

Again, the laugh.

"I shall not leave this place, and neither shall you," he said.

Kalifriki set the arrow to the bowstring.

"Not now, Aidon!" Nelsor shouted. Then, "Or perhaps your friend would shoot an arrow down the well to destroy the dot?" he said. "If he can, by all means bid him do so. For destroying the universe is the only thing I know to protect you from my wrath."

"You heard him, Kalifriki," she said.

Kalifriki drew back upon the bowstring.

"You are a fool," Nelsor said, "to bring—of all things—an archer here to destroy me...one of the legendary ones, I gather, who need not even see the target...against a dead man and a black hole."

Kalifriki turned suddenly, leaning back, arrow pointed somewhere overhead.

"...And a disoriented one, at that," he added.

Kalifriki held this position, his body vibrating in time with the ground.

"You are a doomed, perverse fool," Nelsor said, "and I will use your sisters in your questioning through pain, in testament against you. They will rend you, stretch you, dislocate you, crack your bones."

There came a sound of chains rattling against stone. The chorus was diminished by half as the restraints fell from three of the Alices and their singing ceased. At that moment, their eyes focused upon her, and they began to move forward.

"Let it begin," he said, "in this place of bloody truth."

Kalifriki released his arrow upward. Bearing its dark burden, the Dagger of Rama sped high and vanished into the blackness.

29

Nelsor! She has brought with her a being capable of destroying our universe, and it is possible that he just has. I must perform some massive calculations to confirm my suspicion—but in the meantime our survival depends upon our acting as if it is correct. We cannot return to our alpha point and start again if I am destroyed. And if I am destroyed you are destroyed, along with this place and all of your Alices. We are facing the end of the world! I must confer with you immediately!

30

The three Alices advanced upon the first stair.

31

Aidon! Whatever it is, this is not the time for it! I am finally arrived at the moment for which I have waited all these years. I find your importunities distracting. Whatever it is, deal with it yourself, as you would. I will not be interrupted till I have done with this Alice. Stay away from me until then!

32

The three Alices mounted the first step. At their back, their sisters' song reached a new pitch, as if the crescendo might finally be attained.

33

Very well, Nelsor. I shall act. First Alice, I summon what remains of you. By bone, dot, and siphon, I call you to embodiment upon the Killing Ground! Perhaps you can reason with him.

34

Alice glanced at her three sisters, approaching now upon the farther stair. Kalifriki lowered his bow and unbraced it, slung it. He reached up then and removed the bandage from his eyes.

"Nelsor, listen to me," Alice said. "Aidon will be destroyed. So will the programs which maintain your own existence—unless you reembody and shift your entire consciousness back into human form. Do that and come away with me, for this place is doomed. No matter what our differences, we can resolve them and be happy again. I will take good care of you."

"...'Again'?" Nelsor said. "When were we ever subject to mutual happiness? I do not understand you, clone. What I do not understand most, however, is why one of you killed my wife. And I feel strongly that it was you, Alice my last. Would you care to comment on this?"

From somewhere, a bell began to ring.

"Who sounds the ship's alert?" he cried.

"Probably Aidon," she responded, "as it realizes the truth of what I have been saying."

"You have not yet answered my question," he said. "Did you kill my wife?"

The second skull fell from the niche, rolled to the bloody area near to the first. The bell continued to ring. The voices of the three chained Alices rose and rose.

She grimaced. The other Alices mounted another step.

"It was self-defense," she said. "She attacked me. I had no desire to harm her."

"Why would she attack you?"

"She was jealous of us."

"What? How could that be? There was nothing between us."

"But there was," she said. "You once mistook me for her, and we had our pleasure of it."

"Why did you permit it?"

"For you," she said. "I wanted to comfort you in your need. I love you."

"Then it could have gone by and been forgotten. How did she learn of it?"

"I told her, when she singled me out for reprimand over something one of the others had done. She slapped me and I slapped her back. Soon we were fighting on the ground, here—when this place was elsewhere. She struck me about the head with a tool she had at her belt. This is why I wear these scars. I thought she would kill me. But there was a rock nearby. I raised it and swung it. I was not trying to kill her, only to save myself."

"So you are the one."

"We are the same. You know that. Down to the cellular level. Down to the genes. You cannot have her back. Have me instead, I am the same flesh. You could not tell the difference then. It will feel the same now. And I will be better to you than she ever was. She was rude, imperious, egotistical. Come back. Come away with me, Nelsor my love. I will care for you always."

He screamed, and the three Alices halted at the top of the stair.

Slowly, a haze formed about the skull which faced her.

"Go back, Alices. Go back," he said. "I will deal with her myself."

The skull fell backward—now somewhat more than a skull, as the outlines of features had occurred about it in the haze—and a wavering began beneath it, delineating the form of a body, pulsing it into greater definition. Beside it, however, a similar phenomenon began to invest the second skull. The three Alices at the edge of the oval turned away, began walking back down the stair just as their sisters hit and ran the crescendo, voices changing from wailing to pure song. The three never returned to the wall, however, but faded from sight before they reached the bottom stair. At that time, the chains rang against the wall, and Kalifriki saw that the others had vanished as well.

Shortly, the nude form of a dark-haired, short-bearded man of medium stature took shape, breathing slowly, upon the sand. Beside him, another Alice came into focus, grew more and more substantial.

"You did not tell me the full story," Kalifriki said as they watched.

"I told you everything essential to the job. Would more detail have changed anything?"

"Perhaps," he said. "You fled after the fight, and this is your first time back then, correct?"

"Yes," she said.

"So you were not party to the other six Alices' journeys to this place, save that you monitored them to learn what you could of it."

"That's right."

"You might have warned them that any of them would be suspect. And after the first of them died you knew Nelsor's state of mind. You let your sisters go to their deaths without trying to stop them."

She looked away.

"It would have done no good," she said. "They were determined to resolve the matter. And you must remember that they were monitoring, too. After the first death, they were as aware as I was of his state of mind, and of the danger."

"Why didn't you stop the first one?"

"I was…weak," she said. "I was afraid. It would have meant telling them my story. They might have restrained me, to send me home for trial."

"You wished to take the place of the first Alice."

"I can't deny it."

"I suppose that is her upon the ground now."

"Who else could it be?"

Nelsor and the new Alice opened their eyes at about the same time.

"Is it you?" Nelsor asked softly.

"Yes," she answered.

Nelsor raised himself onto his elbows, sat up.

"So long…" he said. "It has been so long."

She smiled and sat up. In a moment they were in each other's arms. When they parted and she spoke again, her words were slurred:

"Aidon—message for you—to me gave," she said.

He rose to his feet, helped her to hers.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

" 'Portant, 'im, to talk to. World ending. Arrow."

"It is nothing," Nelsor said. "He shot it off in the wrong direction. What is wrong with you?"

"Cur-va-ture. Perfect vector," she said, "to cir-cum-navi-gate small our uni-verse. Back soon. Other way."

"It doesn't matter," he said. "It's just an arrow."

She shook her head. "It bears—an-other—dot."

"What? It's carrying a singularity around the universe on a collision course with Aidon?"

She nodded.

He turned away from her, to face Kalifriki.

"This is true?" he asked.

"This is true," Kalifriki replied.

"I don't believe it."

"Wait awhile," he said.

"It still won't destroy Aidon."

"Perhaps not, but it will destroy the programmed accretion disc and probably wreck your world that it holds together."

"What did she pay you to do this?"

"A lot," he said. "I don't kill for nothing if I can help it."

"The conscience of a mercenary," Nelsor said.

"I never killed three women who were trying to help me—for nothing."

"You don't understand."

"No. Is that because we're all aliens? Or is it something else?"

Just then, the new-risen Alice screamed. Both men turned their heads. She had wandered to the niche where her skull had lain, and only then seemed to notice her scarred clone standing nearby.

"You!" she cried. "Hurt me!"

She snatched the hammer from the ledge and rushed toward the clone. The Alice dodged her assault, reached for her wrist and missed, then pushed her away.

"She's damaged," Nelsor said, moving forward. "She's not responsible…"

The original Alice recovered and continued her attack as Nelsor rushed toward them. Again, the other dodged and pushed, struck, pushed again. The incomplete Alice staggered backward, recovered her footing, screamed, swung the hammer again as her double moved to close with her.

Nelsor was almost upon them, when a final push carried her backward to strike her calves against the lip of the well.

He was wellside in an instant, reaching, reaching, reaching, and catching hold of her wrist. He continued to lean, was bent forward, fell. He disappeared into the well with her, their cries echoing back for several seconds, then ceasing abruptly.

"Lost!" the remaining Alice cried. "She has taken him from me!"

Kalifriki moved to the edge of the well and looked downward.

"Another case of self-defense," he said, "against the woman you wished to replace."

"Woman?" she said, moving forward. "She was incomplete, barely human. And you saw her attack me."

He nodded.

"Was it Nelsor you really wanted?" he said. "Or this? To be the last, the only, the mistress—the original?"

Tears ran down her cheeks.

"No, I loved him," she said.

"The feeling, apparently, was not mutual."

"You're wrong!" she said. "He did care!"

"As a clone. Not as his woman. Give up the memory. You are your own person now. Come! We should be leaving. I don't know exactly when—"

"No!" she cried, and the ground shook and the chains rattled. "No! I am mistress here now, and I will reembody him without memory of her! I will summon the three recorded clones to serve us. The others were witless. We shall dwell here together and make of it a new world. We can bring in what we choose, create what we need—"

"It is too late for that," Kalifriki said. "You brought me here to destroy a universe and I did. Even if it could be saved, you cannot dwell on the Killing Ground forever. It is already destroying you. Come away now, find a new life—"

"No!" she answered. "I rule here! Even now, I take control of Aidon! I remember the command modes! I have reached him! I hold this universe in my hand! I can alter the very physical constants! I can warp space itself to turn your silly arrow away! Behold! I have digested its flight!"

The lights in the sky flickered for the first time and jumped to new positions.

"Change the topology and the geodesic will follow," Kalifriki said. "The Dagger of Rama will still find you. Come away!"

"You! You have hated me all along for what I am! As soon as I told you I was a clone you knew I was something less than the rest of you! But I can destroy you now, assassin! For I am mistress of the dot! I can wish you away in any manner I choose! There is no defense!"

"So it comes to that again," he said. "You would have me pit my Thread against a singularity."

She laughed wildly.

"There is no contest there," she said. "You have already described the entanglement that would result. I believe I will burn you—"

Kalifriki moved his wrist, slowly, to a position above the well.

"What are you doing?" she said. "How can you interfere with my omniscience? My omnipotence? You can't touch me!"

"I told you that the circumference of the Thread is less than a full circle," he stated. "I am cutting out a wedge from your disc."

"That close? You can't. If the warp extends to the hole you would violate thermodynamics. A black hole cannot shrink."

"No," he said. "The Thread would probably be caused to deliver energy to replace it and increase the mass and the radius in compensation. But I am being careful not to let it stray so near, and not to have to test this hypothesis. My sense is extended along it."

"Then you will not die by fire," she said, slurring her words slightly. "By bone—dot—and siphon—I summon you! Sisters! Destroy this man!"

Kalifriki's head jerked to the left, the direction of her gaze.

The three Alices whose eyes focused were flickering into existence across the oval from him. Slowly, he withdrew his wrist beyond the well's wall.

"Kill him!" she said. "Before he kills us! Hurry!"

The three Alices moved, wraithlike, even before they were fully embodied, rainbow's light passing through them as they came on.

Solidifying before they arrived, they rushed past Kalifriki, to attack the one who had summoned them.

"Murderess!" one of them cried.

"Liar!" shrieked another.

"Cause of all our pain!" screamed the third.

The scarred Alice retreated, and Kalifriki shook out his Thread so that it fell among them. A wall of flame rose up between the Alices and their victim.

"There is no time," he called out, "to stain this ground further! We must depart!"

He moved the Thread to enclose the three Alices.

"I am taking them with me," he said. "You come, too! We must go!"

"No!" she answered, eyes flashing. "I will shunt your arrow. I will move this place itself! I will warp space even more!" The lights in the sky winked again, danced again. "I will avoid your doom, archer! I will—rebuild! I will—have—him—back! I—am—mistress—here—now! Begone! I—banish—the—lot—of—you!"

Kalifriki retreated with the three ladies, to the Valley of Frozen Time. There, in the place that is sculpture, painting, map, he laid his way home. He could not speak to explain this, for this was not a place for words (nor wind, music, cries, wailing), nor they to thank him, were that their wish. And while scarred Alice stood upon the Killing Ground and invoked the powers of dot, siphon, and bone against the rushing Dagger of Rama as it cut its way around the universe, Kalifriki transported the three Alices from the land behind the mirror in vanished Ubar, taking them with him to his villa near the sea, though he feared them, knowing that he could never favor one over the others. But that was a problem to be dealt with at another time, for the ways of the Thread are full of arrivals and departures, and even its master cannot digest its flight fully.

35

Alice at the end of the rainbow stands upon the red stain and watches the sky. The siphon brings her nourishment as she plies powers against powers in her contest with the inexorable doom she has loosed. A dark-haired, short-bearded main of medium stature sits upon the edge of the well and seems to watch her. Occasionally, she takes her pleasure of him and he tells her whatever she wishes to hear. She returns, refreshed then, to her duel, though it sometimes feels as if the circle of her universe no longer possesses 360 degrees...

A Word from Zelazny

"In the present story, I did use a character I'd used before, though Kalifriki appeared in a very different sort of story in 'Kalifriki of the Thread'—a piece inspired in part by the atmosphere of some of E. T. A. Hoffman's stories. I knew when I finished the first one that I was not done with Kalifriki. As Chelsea Quinn Yarbro once remarked to me, 'You know you're not finished with characters if they're still talking to you.' And as I once said elsewhere, my characters come by and have morning coffee with me. When their stories are finally told, they generally stop visiting. And Kalifriki kept dropping in regularly. Everyone else herein is new and different.

"Why I should have thought of the Lewis Carroll and the Marquis de Sade in the same breath, I do not know. Once I did, however, the fox in me went looking for pieces to fit the characters and the impulse. And once they were located, I became the hedgehog for the duration [searching after ways to make everything fit its single, central vision]."[1]

Notes

This story is the second of two tales that feature Kalifriki.

The story's title and structure mirror the 1982 film *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean.* In that film, the Disciples of James Dean meet on the anniversary of his death and ponder their existence in the present and in flashback, revealing the truth in their complicated lives. Zelazny's story also uses present and flashback to reveal the truth behind the Alices.

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[1] *Amazing Stories,* January 1992.

All the death-traps in the galaxy, and she has to walk into mine and **Play it again, Alices** echo one of Zelazny's favorite movies, *Casablanca.* Humphrey Bogart's lines were, "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine" and "Play it Sam, play it" (often misquoted as "Play it again, Sam."). A group of eight, the **octad** here is the Alices.

A **caravanserai** in Asia is an inn with a large courtyard. **Zen** Buddhism seeks enlightenment through meditation and by jarring the intellect with koans such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" A **Sufi** is a Muslim mystic. **Constantinople,** renamed Istanbul in 1930, was the capital of several empires (Roman, Byzantine, Latin, and Ottoman). A **cosmic string** is a hypothetical one-dimensional flaw in space-time. The **Sea of Marmara,** Propontis in antiquity, connects the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea. There Jason and the Argonauts encountered a storm, came ashore, and mistakenly killed King Cyzicus. **Ubar**, the lost city that Lawrence of Arabia called the "Atlantis of the Sands," was a shipping center for frankincense and other items. It was destroyed around 100 AD. The space shuttle *Challenger* located it through photos in 1984.

The Porch of the Maidens on the **Acropolis** in Athens uses six statues of women (**caryatids**) as columns. ***Arbor decapitant*** means a tree that cuts off heads, featured in section 15. A **chamberlain** is the royal court's steward, responsible for the monarch's quarters. The ***chakra*** in yoga is one of the human body's seven centers of energy. The **Ramayana** is the Hindu epic in which the demon **Ravan** kidnaps Lord **Rama**'s consort **Sita**. **Bowers** are shaded trees. **Golden Horn** is an estuary in Istanbul near where Kalifriki was staying, and *The Moon's* ***Golden Horn*** is a classical music piece by Arthur Hill. **To eat the bird is not to digest its flight** suggests a Zen aphorism. **Shaddad ibn Ad** founded Ubar, also called **Iram** in the Koran. **Bessel functions** are solutions to some kinds of differential equations used in physics and engineering. Zelazny made up **twar, frogbart, gride, bropples, jankel, vum, slyth** and **fangrace-pair**. A **geodesic** is the shortest line between two points on any surface. The **35** sections of this story allude to numerology where number 35 indicates reality and mind; it may also refer to the 359 degrees that Aidon/Nelsor/Alice's universe now has instead of the usual 360.

PRINCE OF THE POWERS OF THIS WORLD

Christmas Forever, ed. David G. Hartwell, Tor 1993.

"God's balls!" said the first gravedigger, driving his spade into the earth, the better to lean upon it, to watch the bloody glow of the dying sun. "We'll be at this all night!"

"God damned ground's harder nor a stone," said the second. "Just like the old bastard to die midwinter and us to have the buryin' of 'im."

The third paused to blow upon his hands.

"Sooner the damned better he's underground. Out of sight, out of mind," he observed. " 'Twas good watchin' his church burn. By the Old One's split feet! We could use some of that warm now, sure!"

The others chuckled.

"Aye!"

"True!"

They watched the sun slip away, the shadows rush to fill its place.

"Hark! What star is that, on high?" asked the first, pointing.

The others looked in the direction of his gesture.

"He's a right bright ruddy bastard," said the second. "But he ain't big-balled Mars. I don't know… Never seen his like afore."

"Son of a bitch seems to be movin'," said the third, "off to the north."

"Aye," said the first.

"What's this?" asked the second. "Music? D'you hear it?"

"Music? Yer daft," said the third. "Y'd too much ale a' Mistress Doll's."

"Yer bloody deaf! Get the shit outen yer ears and give a listen!"

"He's right," said the first. "It seems to be comin' up outen the ground." With that, he pushed upon his spade with his foot and removed a clod of earth. He leaned then. "Pay heed," he said after a moment. " 'Tis down there."

The others bent forward, listening.

"By Holy Joe's holy horns!" said the second. " 'Tis pipes and some stringy thing and a drum, risin' like a fart outen the bowels of the earth—"

"Lads," said the third, dropping his spade and climbing out of the hole, "I've a mind not to be about when that wind breaks."

The others quickly retreated, also.

As they drew back from the half-dug grave the music came louder and the earth began to vibrate beneath their feet. Then, a dozen paces from their work, they were cast to the ground by a spasm that rippled through it like a wave through water. They shaded their eyes against the sudden illumination of flames which burst from the grave.

"Lords of the year! We're undone!" cried the first. "Behold what elevates from the Pit!"

Like a statue carved from old night, the horned, bat-winged figure rose amid the flames to tower above them. Its great yellow eyes moved from side to side, then fixed upon them where they lay quivering. The music throbbed and skirled about it as it raised a leg to place a hoof the size of a bread loaf upon the grave's edge. Suddenly, its voice sounded, flute-like, above the tune from the earth:

"Rejoice, you miserable motherfuckers, for tonight is the night of your lord's birth!"

"Glad to hear that," said the first.

"I'm rejoicin' a'ready," said the second.

"Me, too," said the third, eyes darting toward the cover of a nearby thicket.

"This night he is born to a former virgin tupped screamin' by the Lord of Darkness in the convent where she dwelled," the dark creature went on. "Cast out by the nuns, refused shelter by the fearful country folk, she wandered, halfmad, till this night when she gives birth in a cave occasionally used for the quartering of animals. Her son is the Messiah of Hell, and I, Asmodeus, proclaim his reign to you! Now get your asses over to the cave and pay him homage!"

The music had risen as he spoke, retreated now as he concluded.

"Aye, Lord Asmodeus," said the first. "But—uh—where shall we find this cave with the babe in it?"

Asmodeus raised his right hand, pointing a talon on high.

"Follow the damned star," he said, " 'Tis really a demon in a fiery chariot. He'll halt it above the cave so there can be no mistake."

"Yes, sir!" said the second.

"We're on our way!" said the third.

Asmodeus leapt from the grave and began to dance. The earth shook again, and from somewhere a chorus of childlike voices accompanied him as he sang:

What child is this that is brought to birth
With eyes like coals a-blazing?
This, this is the Prince of Earth.
Who'll take it to its ending.

When the first gravedigger looked back he saw that the other two were not far behind him.

❖ ❖ ❖

Coming at length to a cave from which a faint glow emerged, the gravediggers halted, then advanced slowly, to peer within.

They beheld a mother and child, reclining on a bed of straw, huddled amid pigs, rats, ravens, and a pair of strange furry creatures.

"What are the two big'uns?" whispered the second gravedigger.

"Jackals," said the first. "I saw their like one time in a book at the castle. The lord was readin' on the eve of a hunt, and he'd a mind to show us pictures of animals from other lands. Don't know what these two might be doin' here, though."

"P'raps they're someone's pets as got free."

"P'raps."

The third gravedigger cleared his throat.

"We'd best be payin' our respects," he said. "Wouldn't want to have Asmodeus mad at us."

"You're right," said the first.

Simultaneously then, all three of them cleared their throats.

The woman, almost a child herself, turned her head in their direction.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Just—just some gravediggers," said the first, entering. "We were told to follow a star and we'd find this place. We came to pay our respects—to your child." The others followed him into the cave. The jackals raised their heads and regarded the men with yellow, unblinking eyes. It was difficult to tell where the light—a pale red glow—came from. Perhaps from the child himself. Silently, the mother began to weep.

"Well, here he is," she finally said, indicating the small black figure at her side. "He's sleeping just now."

The men dropped to their knees.

" 'Tis good you'd a warm furry robe to wrap him 'im in," said the second.

She laughed, though her tears continued to flow.

" 'Tis not a robe. 'Tis his own hairy hide," she said.

"Oh," said the third. "Seein' as you're not so fortunate, let me give you my cloak."

"I can't take your cloak. It's cold out there."

"I've another at home. Take it," he said. "Even with your animal friends you'll be needin' it."

He extended it, let it fall upon her.

"I hope he brings you some kind of joy," said the second.

She bit her lip.

"Who knows? He might take more after me than after his da. 'Tis possible, you know."

"Of course," said the first, turning away. "I wish you good fortune and that the young 'un will love you and honor you and care for you."

"Why should I?" came a tiny voice.

He looked back, and the child's strange eyes (he could never recall their color) were open and fixed upon him.

"He has been able to speak since the moment of his birth," the mother stated.

"Why should I?" the child repeated.

"Because she loves you and tends to you and has suffered for you and will suffer for you," the first replied.

The child turned his gaze upward.

"Mother, is this true?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"I do not want you to suffer," he said.

"There is little you can do about it," she told him.

"We shall see," he stated.

"I guess we'd best be going now," said the first gravedigger.

She nodded.

"Thank you for the cloak," she said to the third.

"Bide a moment," said the child. "Who told you to follow the star to this place?"

"A demon named Asmodeus," said the second. "He came up out of the ground and so bade us."

"And why did you do as he told you?"

"Why, we feared him, sir," said the first.

"I see. Thank you. Good night to you."

The gravediggers backed out of the cave, were gone into the night.

"Those men," the child said then, "do not love me or tend to me as you do. They came because they feared that they would suffer if they did not obey my Uncle. Is that not correct?"

"Yes," his mother said. "That is correct."

"Then which is stronger, love or fear?"

"I do not know," she said. "But the one did not give me his cloak out of fear, and he will suffer from the cold because of it."

"Does that mean that he loves you?"

"It is a kind of love to tend to another when you do not have to. But it is more a friendly thing than a lovely thing. With fear, you do things because you must or you will be hurt."

"I see," said the furry child, snuggling against her. "The man is a friend."

Later, as they dozed, three more figures approached the cave and begged permission to enter. They were three kings who had traveled far and over the sea out of the East and the South, bearing gifts of opium, strychnine, and silver, each of which gave power over people by different means. They desired that their kingdoms be spared when the days of the conflagration arrived—and that, as future allies, they might benefit from the destruction of their neighbors who resisted.

"I begin to understand," the child said after they had left. "They do not love me, they fear me."

"That is right," she said.

"They are not even friends."

"No, they are not."

At midnight a great rush of fire occurred beyond the cave mouth, filling the entire enclosure with baleful brilliance. The mother gasped and shielded her eyes, but the child stared into the flames, where a dark, brooding, masculine form took shape. With a laugh, the figure strode forward, to regard them. Then he stooped, snatched the gravedigger's cloak away from the woman and cast it back over his shoulder, where it burst into flames. Then he threw an ermine robe atop her and the child.

"You!" she gasped.

"Yes," he replied. "My son and my mare deserve the best of garments." Reaching behind him, he produced a stack of shirts, skirts, and swaddling clothes which he laid nearby. "And good meats, fresh fruits, bread, vegetables, herbs, wine." He placed a massive basket upon the floor. Then he leaned to examine the opium, the strychnine, the thirty pieces of silver. "Ah, the kings have been by to plead for their pathetic realms," he said. "Well, do with them as you would, when your time comes."

"I shall," said the child.

"Do you know who you are, boy?" the dark one asked.

"I am her son, and yours."

"That is right, and you can summon a legion of demons to do your bidding simply by naming them. If you think about it, you will see that you know all of their names."

"It seems that I do."

"Do you know what it is that I want of you?"

"Something involving blood and fire and destruction, I believe. Someone may have referred to it as the final conflagration."

"That is close enough. The details will become clearer to you as you grow older. And you can always call upon me for a consultation if you are in doubt."

"Thank you."

"The means will be a young man who would be king. You will meet him one day, make him your slave, help him to his kingship, see him unite this realm, then have him cross the Channel to kick down the remaining holdings of the Roman Empire, take it for his own, and forge it into a new power under his command. Then you will be in position to execute the next phase of my plan—"

"Father, what will his name be, this young king?"

"I cannot see that deeply into things that are yet to be. There is always a cloud about major events."

"Will this man love me, or will he fear me?"

"Neither, if you use your powers properly. Think upon the lessons of your gifts. The silver teaches that people will betray others, and that everything has a price. The strychnine teaches that those who are too troublesome can be eliminated. The opium teaches that people may be placed in thrall, may be led as you choose, by a dulling of their senses and a laying on of glamour. That may be the easiest route with your king. You will know what is best when the time comes."

"I understand you," said the child. "How am I to know this man?"

"A fair question, my son. Behold!" With that, the dark one turned to his rear. When he turned back, he held a blade in his hand. He brandished it on high and it took fire with a roaring sound. Then, with a single step, he crossed the cave and plunged the weapon into a stone. "There," he answered. "He will be the only man capable of drawing that sword from that stone."

"I see," said the child. "Yes, I, too, see these things that are yet to be, through a cloud, dimly. I understand how I may use it."

"Very well, lad. If you need anything, call upon my minions. They will obey you as they would me."

"I shall, father."

The dark one turned, retreated into the flames beyond the cave mouth, and was gone. Moments later, the flames died.

The child yawned and snuggled against his mother once again. "Tell me, son," she asked. "Can you really see the future, like your father?"

"Better," he replied, yawning again. "Arthur shall be my friend."

Notes

The anthology *Christmas Forever* featured stories connected to the holiday. Zelazny's contribution features his typical humor, some uncharacteristic swear words, and the mix of several legends and myths.

The **baby** is the sorcerer **Merlin**, who has foreseen young Arthur, the future king, pulling the sword from the stone. Here Zelazny borrowed from "Merlin," poet Robert de Boron's version of the Arthurian legend. In de Boron's account, a devil (or Satan himself) begets Merlin on a virgin to be the Antichrist. The expectant mother thwarts the plot when she informs her confessor, Blaise. They baptize the boy at birth and free him from Satan's power. God supplements Merlin's uncanny knowledge of past and present, giving the boy the gift of prophecy.

Tupped means had sexual intercourse. **Asmodeus**, one of Hell's four Princes, has battled King Arthur in comic books. Making Asmodeus Merlin's uncle may imply that Merlin's father was the Devil himself.

STORM

To Spin Is Miracle Cat, Underwood-Miller 1981.
Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky*.

Ferocious moment,
written on the eye when
movements writhe to incandescence
the hour,
dynamiting sight to detour sleep.

Self-tracing, everything apart and wholly
scribbles this inaugurated mud
to its own exaltation.
The sight is upon me now,
though I lid myself,
lapping my mind within pillows.

The glowing room,
shameless at this retreat, pencils
prayers of fire on my skin.

THE LONG CRAWL OF HUGH GLASS

Part of *Wilderness* by Roger Zelazny and Gerald Hausman, Forge 1994;
separately: *Superheroes*, eds. John Varley and Ricia Mainhardt, Ace 1995.

In 1823 an injured hunter named Hugh Glass crawled over 100 miles through the wilderness from the Grand Valley to the Missouri River.

Hugh Glass had one chance to kill the bear, and whether his shot struck it or went completely astray, he never knew. It charged him, brushing aside the rifle before he could club with it as its paw fell upon his face, smashing his nose, tearing through the skin of his brow. Then its great forelimbs came about him, its breath awful, fetid of ripe flesh and the musky smell of skunk, overlaid with a sweetness of berries and honey that made him think of a waiting, perfumed corpse, too long aboveground while distant mourners hurried for the viewing.

His spirit seemed to turn slowly within his head and breast, a white and gray eddy of dissolving perceptions, as his blood ran into his eyes and traced trails down his seamed face into his frosted beard. A large man, bearlike himself in the eyes of his fellows, he did not cry out, did not know fear; a great gasp had wrung much of the air out of him, leaving him voiceless, and the attack had come so quickly that there had been no time to be afraid. Now, what he felt seemed familiar; for he was a hunter, providing game for eighty men, dealing daily death as a business of life. And it was suddenly his turn. It would have been good to say farewell to Jamie, but there are always things undone. The cracking of his ribs was not such a terrible thing through the failing white and the gray; the sound from his thigh might have been a snapping branch in some distant forest. He was no longer there to feel the ground as he crashed against it.

* * *

Riding, echoes of his mount's hoofbeats off the hills about him, Jamie saw the shadows flow and merge as he sought downhill for his friend, sky of blood and flame and roses to his left whenever he topped a rise. He could smell the Grand River ahead and to his right. The old man hunted these breaks, was probably camping near here tonight.

"Hugh?" he called. "Hugh?" And a part of his voice rolled back to him.

He continued into the northwest toward the fork, calling periodically.

At the top of another hill the horse stopped short, neighing briefly. For a great distance toward evening the flatlands stretched before him. Below, on either hand, the Grand forked, sparkling, crooked, through haze. He rose in the stirrups, staring, brushed a hand through his sun-gilt hair.

Nothing stirred but the river, and then a rising as of ashes far ahead, with a cawing. A single star was lit above the sunset. A faint breeze came to him from the direction of the water. He called again.

The horse made another sound, took a little prancing step. Jamie touched his mount's sides lightly and headed down the hill, the horse's hoofs clattering in the shale. Level again, on firmer ground, he hurried.

"Camping…" he said softly, and after a time he called again.

There came the boom of a rifle from somewhere ahead, and he smiled.

"…Heard me," he said, and he shook the reins, laughing. His mount hurried and Jamie hummed a tune to the sound of the hoofbeats.

And there, in the grassy area ahead, a figure rose, arms spread. Waving…? The horse snorted and reared, tried to turn. It wasn't a man. Too big, too…

His mount wheeled, but not before Jamie had spied the broken heap upon the ground, recognized the shaggy totem shape—beast that walks like a man—that swayed above it. His hand fell to the rifle boot even as the horse bolted. Cursing, he drew back hard upon the reins but there was no response. At his back, he heard a crashing of brush as the great beast fell to pursuit.

Then he drew again upon the bit and sank his spur into the horse's side. This time it swerved, obedient, to the right. The bear rushed by, passing behind him; and Jamie headed for the water, striking sand, then raising a shower of spray as he entered.

The stream was not wide here. Scrambling, scrabbling, the horse protested the rocky bottom, but a growl from the rear seemed to add impetus to its flight. Shortly, they were rising, dripping, from the water, mounting the farther bank.

Looking back, Jamie saw that the bear had halted at the water's edge. His hand went to the buckle on the rifle case, and he turned his mount as he drew the weapon. Still dry.

He swung it through an arc, cross-body, rested it a moment on his forearm, squeezed the trigger.

Through the smoke-spume, he saw the bear lurch forward, fall into the stream, tossing. He watched its death throes, recalling Hugh's instruction on the placing of shots. Immediately, his eyes were clouded for the man who'd raised him like a son.

Shortly, he was back in the water, crossing. He rode to the fallen man and dismounted.

"Hugh," he said, "I'm sorry," and he knelt beside him. He turned his friend's head then to look upon his face, and he gasped at the mass of blood and torn flesh he beheld, nose smashed flat, brows shredded. "Hugh…"

How long he watched he was not certain. Then there came a soft moan.

He leaned forward, not sure of what he had heard. There followed a terrible stillness. Then came a catching of breath, another moan, a slow movement.

"Hugh? It's Jamie here," he said. "Can you hear me?"

The man made a small noise deep in his throat, lay still again. Jamie looked about. Hugh had made his camp near a spring, its trickling sounds half-noticed till now. A pile of sticks and branches lay near at hand.

"I'm going to make you a fire, Hugh. Got to keep you warm. You just rest easy now. I'll go do that."

Drawing his knife, he split wood. He built a heap of shavings and twigs near the still form, brought it to a flame, fed it, dragged over the larger branches, added more fuel. The sun had fallen over the world's edge by then, and the stars came on like a city in the sky. Jamie hunkered by his fallen companion, the older man's face even more ghastly and masklike by firelight.

"Oh, my," he said. "Next thing we'd better do is get you cleaned up some."

He made his way to the spring, dipped his kerchief into the water, wrung it out. Returning, he sponged and blotted Hugh's face.

"I remember the day you saved my ass in that fight with the Ree," he muttered. "What was I—fourteen? Folks dead, I rode right out into it. You came after. Killed a few and brought me back. Whaled me later for not knowing enough to be afraid. God—Hugh! Don't die on me!"

Hugh Glass lay very still,

"It's me—Jamie!" he cried, catching up a still hand and clasping it to his breast.

But he felt no life in the hand, and he laid it back down gently. He returned to the spring and rinsed his kerchief. He tried trickling water into Hugh's mouth, but it just ran down his face into his beard.

"...Jamie," he said, listening for a heartbeat. Was that it? Soft as an underground stream? He washed the face again. He added kindling to the fire.

Later, the moon came up. In the distance, a wolf howled. Hugh gasped and moaned. Jamie touched his hand again, began speaking softly, of their days on the trail, places they'd been, things they'd seen and done. After a time, his eyes closed. Shortly, his words ceased and he moved in dreams.

...Riding the keelboats with Major Henry's men, trading for horses in the Ree villages. He saw again the Leavenworth campaign amid flashes of fire. Spring thaws and winter freezes... Dressing game with Hugh... Sleeping on the trail, smell of horses, smell of earth... And storms, and the passing of bison... In the distance, his parents' faces...

The neighing of a horse. His head jerked and he realized that his back and shoulders were sore, his neck... He sprawled, dozing again, dreaming or dreamed of the vast prairie in its moods.

...And Hugh's dreams were pain-shot archipelagos of darkness and fire, though it seemed he was not alone in his hurting. He felt he had talked to another, though he was not certain his tongue and lips had really worked. It seemed he had grown roots, extending deep down into the earth, and like a stubborn shrub he held himself to it against a turmoil of weathers, drawing nourishment up into his damaged limbs.

…And a horse neighed, and the ground shook. Jamie opened his eyes and the world was full of morning light. His horse stood nearby. In the earth, he felt the vibrations of horses' hoofs. He shook his head, rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, sat up. Memories returned as he ran his fingers through his hair. He regarded Hugh, whose head now lolled to one side and whose chest moved very slowly.

The hoofbeats were audible now. Hoping it was not a party of Rickaree, he rose to his feet, turning in the direction of the sound.

No, it wasn't the Ree, but rather Major Henry and his men, come riding into the valley from out of the east. They called and waved when they saw him there, grew still as they approached and looked upon the fallen form of Hugh.

"Jamie, what happened?" Major Henry called out, dismounting and coming near.

"Hugh got mauled by a bear," Jamie replied. "He's in poor shape."

"Damn!" the major said, kneeling and placing his hand on Hugh's chest. "Looks a sight, too."

The others came down from their mounts and moved near.

"We should take him back to the camp, get him more comfortable," one of the scouts said.

"…And get some medicine into him," said another.

"Bring up that bay packhorse," the major called out.

"I'm not sure Hugh should be moved," Jamie said.

"We owe the man every chance we can give him," came the reply.

As the bay was brought up and its pack removed, Frank and Will—the red-haired brothers from St. Louis—stooped at Hugh's head and feet, taking hold of his shoulders and ankles. They commenced raising him, slowly, from the earth.

Hugh moaned then—an awful, bleating, animal-like sound. Frank and Will lowered him again.

"Ain't no way we're going to move that man 'thout killing him," Frank stated.

"I think he's bound to die, anyway," Will said. "No reason to add to his misery."

"Poor Hugh ain't got long," Frank agreed. "Let's let him be."

Major Henry shook his head and put his arm around Jamie's shoulders.

"I think the men are right," he said softly.

Jamie nodded.

"We'll wait a time," the major told him. "In case it happens soon."

And Hugh lay like a corpse, save for a periodic sigh, a groan, as the day warmed. The men made tea and, seated in circles on the ground, conversed more softly than was their custom, of the trails they followed toward the Big Horn, of the recent campaign against the Ree, of Indian activity in the area. Some went off to seek the remains of the bear, to butcher it for its meat.

And Hugh's face darkened and lightened, in token of the struggle in which there can be no ally. His hands twitched as if seeking to grapple; and for a time he breathed deeply, a glassy mask of sweat upon his features. Jamie bathed his face again.

"Soon, lad. Soon, I fear," the major told him; and Jamie nodded, sat, and watched.

And birds sang, and the day continued to warm as the sun rose higher in the heavens. Still Hugh gasped, and saliva trickled from the corner of his mouth; his fingers dug furrows in the earth.

When the sun stood in high heaven, Major Henry moved to study the fallen man. He stared for a long while, then turned to Jamie.

"It could take longer'n we figured," he said. "He's a tough one, Jamie."

"I know," Jamie replied.

"The men are getting a little restless, what with the Ree on a war trail just now."

"I understand," Jamie said.

"So we'd be better off heading to the camp west of here, before moving on. You know the trail we were going to take."

"I do."

"So what I figure is to get a man to stay here with you and help keep the wolves away till it's—over. The rest of us'd move on, and you'd catch up with us farther along."

Jamie nodded.

Major Henry clasped his shoulder.

"I'm sorry about Hugh, Jamie. I know what he meant to you," he said. "I'll call for a volunteer now, and we'll be about it."

"Very good, Sir."

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…The bear approached Hugh again, and he could not run from it. It was as if his feet had grown roots. The bear walked upright, its face flowing like dark water. He saw his father there, and the faces of men he had had to kill. Dark birds flew out of the bear, flapping their wings in his face. He smelled the cloying sweetness and the fetor, the rottenness… Then it clasped him and squeezed him again, and he was coughing. He tasted blood with each aching spasm. It seemed that there were voices—many of them—talking softly in the dark distance. The sounds of hoofbeats came and went. He saw the bear dead, skinned, its hide somehow wrapping about him, its face become his own, bleeding, smiling without humor. Closer was it wrapped, becoming part of him, his arms and aching legs shaggy, his mouth foul. Still was he rooted; still the power came up into him out of the earth. Almost a dark, flowing song…

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The hat went round and coins clicked in it, one by one, till Jules Le Bon felt the stirring of compassion and volunteered to sit with Jamie by his friend. A short, wiry man, missing a tooth leftside of his grin, he bade the others good day, stood waiting till they had ridden off. Then he moved to sit by Jamie, clinking as he walked, sighed, and stared at Hugh.

"Amazing strong, that man," he said, after a time.

Jamie nodded.

"Where'd he come from?"

Jamie shrugged.

"So there's nobody you know about—anywhere—to write to?"

Jamie shook his head.

"Shame," said Le Bon. "He was a hell of a hunter. Still, I suppose this is the way he'd want to go—while he was about his business, out on the trail… Buried in one of the places he'd hunted."

Jamie looked away. Le Bon grew still. After a while Le Bon rose and made his way to a fire the men had left where a tin of water was still warm.

"Want a cup of tea?" he called.

"No, thanks."

He made himself a cup and returned with it. Later, he smoked his pipe, drank more tea. The day wore on. Hugh muttered occasionally, grew still again. Le Bon shook his head and looked into the distance.

As shadows slid eastward Le Bon cocked his head.

"Do you hear hoofbeats?" he asked.

"No," Jamie answered.

Le Bon lowered himself to the ground, placed an ear against it. For a long time, he was still.

"Hear anything?" Jamie said.

"No. I was mistaken."

He rose again.

"Little worried about the Ree," he said. "Had me hearing things." He laughed and seized a handful of his hair and tugged it about. "Hate to part company with this stuff, is all."

Later, as they made their dinner of the supplies the major had left them, Le Bon relived his part in the recent campaign. Jamie nodded periodically, watching Hugh. Later still, as the night came on, he covered Hugh with a blanket.

"Amazing strong," Le Bon repeated. "Sad, to have your strength working against you. When there's no hope."

Jamie's dreams were a jumble, of Hugh and the bear and the Indians, of Major Henry and the men, riding, riding, into the distance. He woke unrested in the morning, letting Le Bon sleep as he broke his fast on crackers and tea. Hugh's condition seemed unchanged. Still he struggled—perhaps, as Le Bon had said, against his own strength—moving occasionally, but never speaking, face drawn, gray, fingers at times still ascrabble. How long did it take a man to die?

Later, Le Bon shook his head.

"Looks a lot worse," he said. "Today or tonight will do for him."

"You're probably right," Jamie responded.

"I hope so," Le Bon said. "Not just for our sake—though Lord knows I've seen what those Ree can do to a man—but for him, struggling on that way to no account. It's indecent what dying does to a man, by way of suffering. How old are you, anyhow, Jamie?"

"Sixteen," Jamie said. "Pretty near."

"So you've got your whole life to go yet, lessen it's cut short. Just hope your end doesn't drag out like poor Hugh's."

"Yes," Jamie said, and sipped his tea gone cold.

By afternoon's light, Hugh looked as if he were made of wax, face half-melted. There were times when Jamie thought it was over for him. But always there came a small twitch, a low noise, a bit of bubbling breath. Le Bon raised ladders of smoke, puffing, and watched. Birds passed, to and from the river, uttering shrill notes and bits of softer music. The sky clouded over and there came a rumbling from within it, but no rain fell. A wind rose up and the day grew cooler.

"Wonder how far along the major and the men have gotten?" Le Bon said.

"Hard to say."

"They must feel a lot safer to be on the trail now, heading away from the Ree."

"I suppose."

"We couldn't even hear their hoofbeats for all that thunder, if they were coming up on us now."

Jamie shivered against the cold.

"Guess so."

Le Bon rose and stretched and went off to relieve himself in the bushes. Hugh did not move.

They raised a lean-to of branches for themselves and Hugh, hung a sheet of canvas over it. The rainfall that night was tight, drumming. The sound became war drums in Jamie's steep, and hoofbeats of mounted parties…

The morning came gray and damp, and still Hugh lingered.

"I dreamed a party of them passed us in the night," Le Bon observed. "Maybe they did."

"Then we're lucky."

"So far. My! He looks poorly."

"Same as yesterday, I'd judge."

"Still breathing, though. Who'd've thought any man could hold on so long?"

"Hugh ain't like other folks," Jamie said. "He always knew what to do. He was always strong enough to do it."

Le Bon shook his head.

"I believe you," he told him. "It ain't natural to keep living when you've been tore up the way he has. I've seen a lot of folks a-dying, but none of 'em to hold on like this. You know it's got to be soon, don't you?"

"Seems so."

"Be a shame, the two of us to die for someone who could go any minute."

Jamie went to the spring to rinse the kerchief to wash Hugh's face again.

As they rolled into their blankets that evening, Le Bon said, "This'll be it, boy. I know it. I'm sorry, 'cause I know you're all the family each other's got. Say some prayers, if you know any. I'll do the same, before I sleep."

And the sun shone upon him in the morning. And Jamie's first thoughts were of Hugh. Turning, rising, he stared. Had it happened during the night? No. The pallor remained, but now a small fluttering breath had begun, unlike the man's earlier gasps and long silent spells. His chest moved slightly, with a more rapid, shallow breathing.

"I've seen men like this before," he heard Le Bon say. "Soon it will be over, lad. Likely with God's blessing."

Jamie wept silently. It was wrong to want it to happen, he knew.

"I just want him to stop hurting," he finally said.

"And soon he will, Jamie. Soon he will." Le Bon sounded sad. "There's few as could fight it the way he did. But soon his trials will be over. You can see it."

Jamie nodded, rubbing his cheeks dry against his shoulders.

After breakfast, Le Bon stared for perhaps an hour at the man who lay before him. Finally, he spoke:

"I've been thinking," he said, "about the Ree again. You know I'm scared. I know you are, too. Now, meaning no disrespect, and knowing Hugh'll be gone soon, it takes a time to bury a man—especially when we've only our knives to dig with. All that extra time we'll be running risk they'll find us, when we could be riding away."

"That's true."

"Being practical now—and like I said, with no disrespect—I thought we might dig it now and have it ready. We're just sitting here, anyhow, and whether it gets dug before or after won't mean a thing to him. It's the spirit that counts, that his friends mean to do right by him. It can't hurt him none to make it ready. But it could make a difference for our safety—afterwards."

"Yes," Jamie said. "I guess he'd understand that."

So, drawing his knife, Le Bon rose and moved about to Hugh's far side. He traced long lines in the earth with its point, measuring the man's great length and width with his eye as he did so. Then he plunged the blade into the ground and outlined the first piece of sod to be removed.

"'Dust to dust,'" he said, "like the Good Book tells us. We'll do fair by him, Jamie. Proper size and deep enough to protect him from weather and the critters. We'll do it right. I know how much you care about him."

After a time, Jamie rose and moved to the plot's farther end. He hesitated a moment, and then began to cut.

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They dug all that day, using their hands where it was soft, their blades where the earth resisted intrusion. They removed stones, roots, and a goodly amount of soil. They excavated to a considerable depth, then cleaned their blades in the grass and washed themselves at the spring, before they returned to Hugh's side.

Still that fluttering breath continued.

They ate their meal, and the day's last light touched Hugh's face with color. They watched him till the stars came out, then muttered good-nights and found their blankets.

In all their dreams, Hugh was a part of the earth.

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…Hugh dreamt he lay broken beside his grave, his friends riding away into the west. He had heard them speak of going, been powerless to respond. Now he heard only hoofbeats as they went away from him. Felt them within the earth, heard a momentary exchange of their distant voices.

Vaguely, aware of light, he listened to the sounds. The words died away. A tired moon hung above him. He stared at it through a haze. Dawn had leaked a slight light upon strands of mist. There was no wind to stir it. The hoofbeats seemed to grow louder again. He remembered the taste of blood, the breath of the bear. And crawling…

He was awake atop his bluff, and the sounds of hoofbeats were real. He turned and peered downward. Passing through the fog, three Indian horsemen rode on the trail of the buffalo. Almost, Hugh called out to them, for they could well be Sioux, with whom he was on good terms. Yet, they could also be Ree, and he had not come all this way to deliver himself into the hands of his enemies. He lay still and watched them ride by to vanish westward into the mist.

They could well be the outriders for an entire tribe on the trail of the buffalo. He would wait a time and see what followed. With a larger group, slower in passing, he should be able to tell whether they were friend or foe. And then—If they were Sioux, he would be fed, cared for, his wounds tended. He would tell them tales at their fires, paying them in the coin of stories from his wanderings. Then he would walk again, be about his hunt.

He waited as the fog turned to gold, listening, watching. The sun drifted slowly out of the east, over the course of perhaps an hour. Abruptly, a flock of dark birds rose downstream, cawing and flapping, to move westward, settling in a stand of cottonwoods. Then he heard the barking of dogs and the neighing of horses. A little later a band of mounted warriors came into sight out of the brush, to pass the base of his bluff upon that westward trail.

He watched, suddenly aware of his heartbeat. Mounted on a piebald stallion, the lead warrior was an older man, face hard and craggy, hair streaked with white; and Hugh recognized him. It was Elk Tongue, the war chief of the Ree, and more and more of his people came into view behind him, rounding the bluff, continuing into the west.

As Hugh watched he saw old men and women, children, the ill as well as the hale, in the procession. This looked to be more than a hunt, for it might be forty lodges that followed behind Elk Tongue, and they bore all their possessions, not just those of the hunt. The Sioux must finally have succeeded in dislodging them from their eastern encampment. They were in retreat now, ponies dragging travois bearing furs, pots, drums, baskets of food, a few metal implements, small children riding atop the heaped household goods; the forms of those too ill to walk or ride were strapped onto other carriers. Nursing squaws passed by, babies at their backs. All of them looked haggard. Hugh could almost smell their burning cornfields. They would follow the herd, to feed, then continue to the home of their Pawnee relatives on the Platte.

Hugh snorted. "Ree" was short for "Arikara." They had attacked peaceful traders several times, which led to the Leavenworth campaign, in which the Sioux had allied themselves with the whites, for they, too, had known unreasoned violence at the hands of these people. The Rees' cousins the Pawnees were more tolerant, less prone to battle and ambush without good reason. Having been a Pawnee, Hugh spoke their language fluently, the Rees' dialect as well, though he was certain that the Rees would not recognize his blood-tie with their kin.

Not that the Pawnees were exactly easygoing…

As the tribe passed he let his thoughts drift back over the years. Where did it all begin? Beyond the Pennsylvania valley of his birth, what had brought him to this point? Chance, he supposed. Chance, and human meanness—the meanness of a white man, a Frenchman, as cussed as any he had met on the plains, white or Indian. No race, nation, or tribe had a monopoly on cussedness; it just seemed a part of being human. He remembered the sea.

After that war in 1812 he'd gone to sea, working on traders in the Caribbean. Never had any real desire to see the mountains or roam the plains. He'd known tropic ports, drunk his share of rum, survived fierce storms and damaged vessels. He had enjoyed the sea and its smells and moods, liked the bright birds and flowers and girls of his ports of call, liked the taste of their rich foods, their wines. He would likely be there still, save for the doings of one afternoon on the Gulf.

When the sleek vessel carrying a lot of sail had first been sighted, no one had been particularly alarmed until she struck her true colors and fired a warning shot.

The captain tried to run, but this was a mistake. The pirate vessel overtook them readily. He tried fighting back then, but this, too, was a mistake. He was outmaneuvered, outgunned, outmanned. Actually, there was nothing he could have done that would have been right, Hugh reflected. Simple surrender at that first warning shot would also have been a mistake. Hugh was to learn all of this later, firsthand, though it was mainly confirmation of rumors he had been hearing for years. The captain could not have saved them from Jean Lafitte, who was not of a humor to leave any witnesses to his business that day.

Hugh saw the captain and the other officers cut down. The seamen were treated the same way. This decided him against any attempt to surrender, and he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. Standing back to back then with seaman Tom Dickens, cutlass in one hand, belaying pin in the other, he killed everyone who came at him, gutting them, clubbing them, hacking at limbs and faces. The deck grew slippery with gore about him, and he bled himself from a collection of wounds. After a time, the attacks slowed; it seemed that the pirate crewmen were holding back, loath to rush in and close with him. Finally, he became aware of a tall individual who stood watching the slaughter. Eventually, the man spoke:

"Let up!" he ordered. "I'll talk to them." Hugh heard the French accent and realized this to be the captain of whom he had heard stories.

"You two," the captain said, as soon as the attacks ceased. "Do you wish to live?"

"A foolish question," Hugh replied. "Would we be fighting so, were it otherwise?"

The Frenchman smiled.

"I can have my men wear you down, or I can send for firearms and take you at a distance," he said. "Or you can join my crew and keep your lives. I find myself undermanned again, partly because of yourselves. I can use a pair of good fighters."

"Druther live," Tom said.

"All right," said Hugh. "I'll do it."

"Then put up your weapons—you can keep them—and help transfer the cargo to my ship. If you've any personal effects you care about, better get them, too. We'll be scuttling this scow when we're done here."

"Aye, sir," said Hugh, lowering his blade and slipping the club behind his belt.

Jean Lafitte's current headquarters were on Galveston Island. There Hugh and Tom were given quarters. While he made no friends, Hugh became acquainted with all of the pirate crew. There was some resentment of the newcomers at first, and while memory of their display on the decks of the doomed vessel prevented all but two from carrying this beyond words, those two were thick-armed, heavy-shouldered fellows with the battered faces of brawlers. The burly Hugh outwrestled his man and bashed him a few times till he lapsed into unconsciousness. Tom boxed with his opponent, and though his own nose was broken in the encounter he laid the man out. After that, the two shipmates met with no further violence at the hands of the crew and found themselves on speaking terms with all of them. While no real amiability developed, the men were not particularly amiable to begin with, save when drunk, and then it only took the form of songs, gallows humor, bawdy yarns, and practical jokes. Hugh did not trust himself to get drunk with them, for they were inclined to the setting afire of beards and to the removing of a fellow's trousers and painting his bum with tar.

Hugh and Tom sailed with Lafitte. There were bloody encounters with merchantmen, for it became apparent that Lafitte's policy involved leaving no eyewitnesses ever to testify against him. Hugh fought in the boarding of vessels and he fought to defend himself, but he took what small pride he might in the fact that he never executed prisoners. This changed one spring day when they took a British trader.

Three able-bodied prisoners were taken that day. Lafitte faced them—a tall, graceful figure, elegantly clad, one hand upon his hip—and stared into each man's eyes until they fell. Then, as before, he spoke:

"Gentlemen," he said, "I find myself somewhat understaffed at the moment. The exigencies of this work do take their toll in manpower.

So I've a proposition for you. Join my crew. You'll have a snug berth, all you want in the way of food and drink, and a share of the booty. There will be occasional shore leave in safe ports to enjoy it. It is a dangerous life, but a high one. Think hard, think quickly, and answer me now."

Two of them agreed immediately. The third, however, asked, "And if my answer is no?"

Lafitte stroked his beard.

"Consider it a matter of life or death, sir," he replied, "as you make your decision."

"All my life I've done what I had to and tried to be honest while I was about it," the seaman answered, "though God knows I've had my lapses. Cast me adrift or leave me on some isle if you would. I'd rather that than join your crew."

Lafitte raised his eyes and caught Hugh's gaze.

"Deal with him," he said.

Hugh looked away.

Lafitte stared a moment longer. Then, "Now," he added.

Hugh looked back, meeting his captain's dark gaze again.

"No, sir," he replied.

"You refuse my order?"

"I won't kill a defenseless man," he said.

Lafitte drew a pistol from his sash and fired it. The man toppled, the side of his head gone red.

"Pitch him over the side," Lafitte said to another crewman, who moved immediately to comply.

"Hugh, I'm unhappy with you," Lafitte stated, stowing his pistol and turning away.

Hugh departed and helped to transfer the cargo.

Later, when they had returned to their base, Tom said to him, "Word's going around you made the captain unhappy."

"I wouldn't doubt it," Hugh replied. "I didn't kill a man he told me to."

"I heard things like that have happened in the past, before our time."

"Oh?"

"Old Jean, he's a real stickler for discipline. They say that nobody as refused a direct order from him has lived too long afterwards."

"How'd he do 'em?"

"Sometimes he holds a sort of court and makes an example of 'em. Other times he just lets it be known to a few he trusts that he wants that man dead. Someone always obliges and puts a knife in him then—when he's sleepin', or some other time he's not on his guard."

"You heard he usually gets rid of them pretty soon after something like this happens?"

"That's what they say."

"Thanks, Tom. Maybe you shouldn't be talking to me much now."

"What're you going to do?"

"I've been thinking for some time about leaving. Now's as good a time to try quitting this business as any."

"You can't steal a boat, Hugh. They watch 'em too careful."

Hugh shook his head.

"Think I'll wait till after dark and swim for shore."

"That's a pretty far piece."

"I'm a pretty good swimmer."

"The water's sometimes sharky."

"Well, that's a maybe, and staying's a for sure."

"What'll you do when you get to shore?"

"Start walking for New Orleans."

"I'm coming with you. I don't much like it here myself. Sooner or later he's going to ask me to do something like that, and the same thing'll happen."

"Make a little bundle of your valuables then. I'll let you know when I'm going."

Hugh waited till the others had started their evening drinking before he nodded to Tom and said, "Gonna take a walk."

They met on the isle's northern shore, lit by a partial moon and floods of stars. Small waves danced in their light as Hugh and Tom stared out over the waters.

"Looks like a long haul," Tom said, "but I'm still game. How long you figure before they guess what we did?"

"Morning, if we're lucky. Sooner, if tonight's the night someone comes by to get me. Even then, they can't do much till tomorrow, and we'll either be drowned, et, or too far gone by then."

Tom nodded.

"I'm ready any time you are."

"Let's be about it then."

So they stripped, bundled their clothes about their possessions, tied their packs to their backs, and entered the water. It felt cooler than the night's air, but their strokes were strong and after a time the exertion seemed to push the chill away. They swam steadily landward, and Hugh thought back over the previous months' piracies. He'd wanted to leave before this, but the danger had held him back. Now he wished he'd left sooner. Stealing, killing, drinking too much every day, and being a prisoner much of the time made him think again of the world's meanness. There was too much of it, everywhere he turned. He wanted to be alone in a big place, away from his fellows, free. He wondered whether the man he'd refused to kill had had a family. He wasn't sure he ever wanted one himself. Another way to be a prisoner, maybe.

Crawling through the water, he lost track of time. There was the monotony of the waves, Tom's steady splashing nearby, and the sameness of the night all around. The two shores were dreams, the crawling was all. One must go on.

At some point, he remembered coming to shore. Now the waters of Galveston Bay seemed the dream, the land they waded toward the reality. He remembered laughing and hearing Tom's laughter. Then they threw themselves flat, breathing heavily, the tingling of ceased motion dancing over their skins. After a while, they slept.

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...Lying there, still as a stone, he watched the latter end of the procession in its passing, through a haze of fog and trail dust—the lame and the aged walking with sticks, leaning on companions, more squaws with children and packs of supplies. They did take care of their own, he reflected, and he could almost feel a touch of sympathy at their flight from the Sioux, though it was their own cussedness had brought them to this pass. He and Tom had been captured by the Ree on their trek through Texas, but had managed to escape. They were wary after that because of the treatment they had received. But all the wariness in the world didn't amount to much for two men afoot on a plain when they were spotted again by a mounted party.

They tried hiding in the scrub, but the warriors knew they were there and flushed them quickly. Hugh tried the few words of Ree he had learned during their brief captivity, and his new captors showed understanding of them as well as of his raised open hands and his sign gestures. They made it obvious, however, that they were prisoners by taking their knives and conducting them to be confined in their camp.

They were tied and guarded that night, and while they were given water to drink they were not fed, though they were allowed to dine from their own meagre supply of fruit and roots they had obtained on departing from the Rees. The following day they were not molested, though they remained confined, and they spent the second night under guard, also. A considerable babble of discussion emerged from a nearby tent late into both evenings.

The next day they were brought food and treated with some kindness. They were given fresh garments and led about the camp. As the day wore on, Hugh attempted to communicate with their captors, hoping to win their release, but the only responses he received seemed to indicate that they would be permitted to join in a feast that evening.

The day wore on, and at sunset they were conducted to a gathering of the entire tribe in whose company they were seated. Fires burned at every hand, and the smells of roasting buffalo, venison, and fowls came to them. They sampled every dish, as their hosts insisted that they try everything, that they gorge themselves on their favorite fare.

They were infected by the tribe's seeming good humor, and began to relax and try to make jokes themselves. Finally, sated and a little drowsy, they began looking forward to the feast's end, to retiring to a night's rest. Abruptly then, they were seized from behind by several braves and bound hand and foot with strips of rawhide.

"Hey!" Hugh shouted, then added the word he'd learned for "friend."

Nobody answered him. Instead, Tom was taken to a tall, upright stake and tied to it. Squaws cut away his garments, stripping him, and heaped kindling about his feet.

"Let the boy go!" Hugh called. "Friend! Friend!"

They paid him no heed, and the women went to work on Tom with knives, cutting away strips of his skin.

"Stop! Stop it, for God's sake!" Hugh screamed, his cries half-drowned by Tom's own shriek.

The women continued about their business, taking their time, removing patch after patch of skin, occasionally poking and prodding with the points of their weapons. Hugh became acutely aware of the second stake which had been raised, not too far behind the first. He closed his eyes against the sight, gritted his teeth, and tried to blank out Tom's cries. It did no good. Not seeing was in some ways worse than seeing, leaving even more to his imagination.

The ordeal went on for a long while, till Tom finally pleaded with them to kill him. Even later, they started a fire at his feet and heaped more kindling upon it. Hugh had shouted at them to no avail and had used up his tears early. Now he just watched as his friend writhed within the consuming flames. He tried not to, but his gaze kept returning to the spectacle. Soon it would be over. Then, of course, it would be his turn.

He remembered a small container of vermilion dye which he had borne with him from Galveston island, as it had some commercial value and he'd hoped to sell it on reaching civilization. He hated to see it burned up, wasted, and it would make fine body paint, a thing his captors seemed to favor. What the hell, he decided. Maybe it could do even more for him here.

He groped with bound hands at the place where he carried it at his belt. Painfully, he unfastened its ties. When it came free and he had a grip on it, he raised himself.

Casting the bundle at the chief, he cried, "Here's a present for you! Hate to see it go to waste!"

The chief stared at the parcel, then extended a hand and picked it up. He removed it from the leather pouch and examined it closely, until he had discovered the manner in which the tin might be opened. When it had been uncovered his eyes widened. Tentatively, he touched the substance with a fingertip, raised it to study it, drew a line with it upon his forearm.

A pair of braves was already headed for Hugh by then, but the chief raised a hand and said something Hugh did not understand. The warriors halted.

The chief advanced then and addressed Hugh, but Hugh shook his head and said, "Present. It's a gift. I do not understand what you are saying."

The chief continued to speak, however, finally calling something back over his shoulder. Presently, a brave approached, drawing a knife as he advanced upon Hugh. Hugh gritted his teeth as the blade's point passed near his abdomen, but the man used it only to cut his bonds.

The brave helped him to his feet, and the chief came forward and assisted him. They guided him back to his quarters, where he sank upon his sleeping skins. The chief said something else then, smiling as he said it, and went away. The man who had freed him remained on guard outside.

He did not think he would sleep easily that night, yet he did. The evening's events returned in his dreams, and in the morning he recalled awakening several times to the sound of his own voice calling Tom's name. After a while a woman brought him breakfast, and he was surprised at his appetite. He finished everything and when she brought him more he ate that, too.

The day wore on and he waited. He was fed again at about noontime. No one approached him other than the woman with the food. He made no attempt to venture beyond his confines. He sat and thought, about Tom, about Lafitte, the Caribbean, ships, sailing on a bright day, Pennsylvania summers.

Later they came for him and escorted him back to the site of the previous night's feasting. He surveyed the area hastily, but this time there were no stakes in sight. He moved to settle into the position he had occupied before but was halted by his companion and taken forward, where it was indicated that he should sit beside the chief.

This dinner was different from the previous one in that it was preceded by a speech from the chief and a ritual of sorts where he placed his hands upon Hugh's shoulders and head several times, struck him lightly with bundles of twigs, bound his hair with a beaded cloth, and finally draped a small skin over his shoulders. Then the feasting proceeded in a jovial spirit with others of the tribe passing by to clasp Hugh or lay hands upon him. Gradually, he came to understand that the chief had adopted him, that he had become a member of the tribe, that he was now a Pawnee.

In the months that followed he learned the language, the customs, discovered that he had a knack for tracking, became a deadly marksman with bow and arrow, took him a Pawnee wife, became one of the tribe's better hunters. He learned, too, that the life of the trail appealed to him more than the life of the sea, with its cramped quarters. The plains held all the freedom of the vast and changing sea, without the confining drawbacks. He did not know exactly when he resolved to spend his days on the frontier. The realization grew in him slowly. Before the first winter had passed, however, he knew that he had finished forever with a sailor's life.

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Yes, he had enjoyed it. But reflecting upon it now, as the Pawnees' less reputable relatives vanished into the west leaving a cloud of golden dust behind them, he saw that meanness again, on the night the Pawnee women had tortured Tom. True, they'd had grievances against the whites, but a bullet in the brain or a quick knife-thrust would as easily satisfy a need for a death. It was nothing special against the Pawnees, though, who had been good to him during his stay in their midst. Rather, he felt, they had their cussedness because they were members of the same race as all the other tribes of the earth.

He rubbed dust from his eyes then, and licked his lips. Time to crawl down and get himself a drink, see what he could find to eat.

Slowly, he descended and made his way to the river, where he drank and washed his face, hands, and neck. The area about him was too trampled to retain edible roots or berries. He crawled then to the carcass where he had fed the previous evening. It had been picked clean, however, its bones cracked and scattered or carried off.

Back in the direction of the bluff where he had spent the night, beyond the trees, Hugh saw a movement. He lay perfectly still and watched. Some final straggler of the migrant Rees.

He crawled ahead then, among the trees, through the brush, shortcutting a bend in the trail to bring him to a waiting place ahead of the shuffling figure.

An old woman clad in buckskins moved carefully along, bearing her small bundle of possessions. He licked his lips and checked behind and ahead. No one else had come into sight to the rear, and the rest of the tribe was gone from view, far ahead. There was sure to be some food in her pack, and the others would hardly soon miss someone they hadn't even bothered to wait for. Flint, steel, a knife… Even in his condition it would be no problem to take them from her. Her cries would not be heard above the noise of the van.

He watched her move. Ironic, if she'd been one of the ones who'd done for Tom that long-gone day. She shuffled nearer, and he wondered at her life. How many babies had she carried? How many were living now? Just an old woman… He watched as she passed, remained still till she was out of sight beyond a clump of trees.

"Fool!" he muttered, to have let her go by, mother of Rees. It was not the same as when he'd refused to kill a helpless seaman. This was the enemy. He shook his head. "Fool," he said softly. Sometimes he was a fool.

Growling, he turned away, heading back toward the river.

He followed the water's course, down along the trail the Ree had come. It was easy traveling, though the dirt irritated his nose, and he halted to wash his face several times. Berry bushes beside the trail had been stripped, as had the lower branches of fruit trees he passed. He dug a few roots when he was beside the river, washed them, broke his fast with them.

Before long all of the fog had burned away, and the dust had settled. During the next hour he made good progress. The sun spilled some warmth through the yellow and green of the tree limbs, and there was a fresh strength in him today.

Topping a small rise, he halted and sniffed the air.

Smoke. The breeze brought him a hint of smoke. Beginning of a brush fire, or its residuum? Or might someone be camping nearby?

The breeze shifted and the smell vanished. Had it really been there, to begin with?

He crawled forward again, sniffing the air regularly. Nothing now. Still…

It was several minutes before it came again. It was still faint, and a breeze's vagary took it away once more. But now he was certain. He had smelled woodsmoke. It was impossible to determine its direction, so he continued along the trail.

Another hundred feet and it came to him clearly. The trail, then, did seem the proper course. He wondered again at what it might represent. Aid? Or an enemy?

He moved off the trail and continued to advance, with more difficulty now, among the trees, brush, and rocks that paralleled its course. It seemed prudent to have a look at any campers without being seen himself.

The campfire smell grew stronger. He slowed when he felt he was nearing its vicinity. Finally, he halted and lay still for a long while, listening for voices. There were none, though he thought he heard the growling of one or more dogs. Finally, he began to move again, deliberately, soundlessly.

After a time, he drew near the periphery of a cleared area. He parted the stems of a shrub and peered through at it. It had obviously been used as a campsite recently. There were no people in sight, but several dogs prowled it now, whining, scavenging.

Studying the grounds, where a great number of people had probably passed the night, he realized that this must have been the Ree's latest encampment. They had proceeded from here past his aerie. He watched a little longer, until he was satisfied that the place had been completely abandoned.

He moved forward then and entered the area. No telling what might have been lost or left behind by a fleeing tribe. Their fires were normally extinguished completely, but with the Sioux at their heels they were moving fast. It would be worth a quick survey. He shouted at the dogs in Pawnee, and they slunk away from him.

He advanced upon the one fire which still smoldered, then halted and lay staring at it. How long had it been since he had seen a fire, sign of humanity? How long since he had been able to kindle one himself? He thought of many he had sat beside—campfires, hearthfires—and he suddenly felt that he had indeed come a great distance, that he had come back to something. He chuckled in realizing that he lay prostrate before it. His life was wilderness, yet many things set him apart from the beasts. No bear could feel exactly as he did in returning to such a sign of a former existence. He patted the earth beside it, then moved on.

His tracker's eye caught all of the camp signs clearly—the places where the campers had eaten, the places where they had slept, their trails to water and latrine. Even without having seen them go by, he could roughly estimate their number, could separate the tracks of the aged and the children from those in between. The dogs studied him as he explored, but seemed afraid to draw near this man-scented thing of low profile and bestial movement.

With a stick, he stirred the ashes of their fires, where all of their trash seemed to have found its place. All of these others were cold now, and while some of the trash—bits of cloth, leather, wood—had not been completely incinerated, it seemed that nothing of any value lay within. Until the fifth…

Poking within the soft gray heap at the center of a circle of stones, he almost missed the tiny flash. But he did not even pause as it registered. Immediately, he moved the stick again, to knock free its outline and clear its surface. A slim, worn length of whetted steel, its point broken off, haft charred, lay before him in the dust.

He dropped the stick and snatched it up. Steel, serviceable steel…

He wiped it on his pant leg, held it up for closer scrutiny. He tested its edge. A bit dull, but easily honed. And he could wrap the handle with some cloth torn from his shirt. Then, turn up a piece of flint and he could strike a fire whenever he needed it. He smiled.

He could carve a crutch. The hip and leg were feeling somewhat better. It was possible, had he something to lean on, that he might be able to hobble along in an upright position now.

He studied the rocks that ringed the burned-out fires, seeming to recall a small, flat one that just might serve as a whetstone. Yes. Over to the right…

He fetched the stone and began honing the blade. He found himself wanting to whistle as he did it, but refrained.

Later, with a satisfactory edge upon the blade and the jagged point somewhat blunted, he cast about among the trees for a limb suitable for his crutch.

It was the better part of an hour, spent crawling among trees, before he located an appropriate branch, at a height to which he could drag himself by holding first to the trunk, then grasping a tower limb, the knife clasped in his teeth. After notching it and whittling it free, it took him another hour—sitting, back to the tree trunk—to trim it properly, find and adjust to the right length through repeated testing, and to carve a comfortable armrest upon it.

He held it across his lap and regarded it. A knife and a crutch in one morning… If he could use the latter as well as the former, this was a very important day.

Hand against the tree trunk, pulling, left leg straightening, he drew himself up to his full height and then leaned as he fitted the rest to his right armpit. Still holding to the tree with his left hand, he shifted weight onto the crutch. It bore him. He allowed his right foot to touch lightly upon the ground.

He took a step with his left foot, shifted his weight, moved the crutch a small distance, shifted again. He let his left hand fall from the tree. Another step with the left foot. Shift. Move the crutch. Shift.

To be upright again—albeit with aid—not to be crawling—yes, it was an important day. He smiled. He made his way about the campsite. The dogs watched him but kept their distance, tails sinking when he turned his attention upon them. He thought of killing one for food, but they were wary of him. Yes, he really was human, they must have decided. And a stranger, and odd.

Now. Now, then. Now. Time to search out a piece of flint.

A canvassing of the immediate area did not turn up a chunk of that stone. So he decided to continue on his way, scanning all rocky deposits as he went.

Upright. It did not take long to get into the rhythm of the trail with his new gait. He sprawled periodically to rest his left leg, and his right shoulder. It was difficult to determine whether he was covering ground more rapidly in this fashion or when crawling at his best. Yet he was certain that with increasing familiarity, usage, and strength, this means of progress would soon outstrip the earlier.

He swung along his way into the afternoon till thirst drove him from the trail down among the cottonwoods by the river. And it was there he found his flint. Almost singing, he made his way to the water's edge. When his shadow fell upon it, he saw a darting of forms. Fish had been browsing in the shallows.

After he drank his fill, he used his blade to fashion a spear from a straight stick. Waiting then in such a position that his shadow did not impinge upon his chosen stretch of water, he tried for half an hour before obtaining two catfish.

With some threads from his sleeve and a pile of wood shavings, he was able to start a fire with his new tools. He fed it slowly, and while it strengthened to the consumption of larger sticks, he cleaned his fish on a flat rock and washed them in the river. He grilled them on willow wands, trying the while to calculate how long it had been since he had eaten food that had been cooked. He had to give up, however, as he soon realized he had lost track of the days during his crawl.

After he had eaten he stripped and bathed in the river, remembering that bitter pool near the beginning of his journey. Here, he could tilt his head and drink whenever he wished. And amid his buoyancy and movements he felt that he was coming back together again.

He washed his tattered garments then and donned them wet. He was tempted to loaf the day away, letting them dry on a bush, but he felt uncomfortable this near the Ree. He doubted any would be doubling back to check after pursuit, but it was possible, if the Sioux had indeed pursued them for a time. And though it seemed unlikely there would be any stragglers this far back, some mishap might have slowed someone who was even now hurrying to catch up. So he remained alert as he swung along, ready to depart the trail in an instant at the first sign of humanity.

The afternoon wore on, however, with only the sounds of the birds and a few splashes from the sunken river to keep company to the small thumps of his crutch. A few yellowed leaves came loose and dropped about him. His armpit and shoulder grew sore, but his leg was feeling better, even when he touched it down in occasional testing. His scalp, forehead, and nose were feeling better, also, some of the scabbing having come away as he had bathed. He could not recall when the headaches had ceased.

There were no fruits or berries to be had along his way. The Ree had stripped the bushes and trees as they had gone by. Hugh decided that it would be fish again for his dinner, if they were to be had. He stumped along, realizing, for the first time in a long while, that he was enjoying the day.

He thought back as he hiked, to the time he had spent with the Pawnees, his earlier reverie having breathed fresh life into those memories. He recalled their leader's decision to journey to St. Louis, where a meeting involving large-scale trapping was to be held. It had been decided that it might be a good thing to send a peace mission, to let the fur company know that the Pawnees were a dependable, friendly people, who might be counted upon to provide guides, messengers, labor, in their enterprise. It might benefit the tribe by promoting a preferred status when it came to trading, particularly for metal goods, firearms, ammunition, horses. It certainly seemed worth the effort.

It felt strange, entering the city, being there, back among his own kind—or were they? He had changed, he realized then. It only took a few days, in rooms and on busy streets, before a feeling of confinement came over him. Reading a newspaper was a pleasure he had all but forgotten, though, over a morning cup of coffee. It was there that he saw an ad, in the *Missouri Republican*, which tied in with the Pawnees' journey, and which got him to thinking again of things that had passed through his mind more casually during the past couple of days. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company was looking for men to supplement this year-old trapping company's crew at its Ft. Henry trading post. Major Andrew Henry, after whom the post was named, needed hunters as well as trappers, and especially people with knowledge of Indian languages and ways. He was later to learn that the fort, near the mouth of the Yellowstone River, had lost both horses and men to raiding Assiniboine and Blackfeet warriors.

Yes, it sounded like the sort of enterprise which might meet his fancy, and for which he doubtless was qualified. He had grown tired of the tribal life of the Pawnees. But this—All that movement, and new lands to see… He smiled as he finished his coffee. He would have to go for an interview and learn all of the details.

So he had gone, talked, and been offered employment. His experiences seemed to impress the interviewer strongly, and he had signed him on for the work.

In the days that remained in St. Louis, Hugh met a number of men who had lived in the wilderness—some of them attracted by the fur company's hiring, others just passing through, in both directions. One of these had been that strange man, John Colter, who had actually traveled to the far ocean with Lewis and Clark. There was an odd light in his eye, which Hugh at first took as a touch of lunacy but later decided was…something else—something like the look of a medicine man who had been long in the dream-time. Colter did not recite his tales with the braggadocio of the seasoned yarner but with a conviction Hugh found vaguely unsettling. He came away from their talks of travels and adventures with a belief in the man's absolute sincerity, and he was to wonder about him for years afterwards…

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…Later, as the evening came on, he caught his fish, grilled them, and dined. Then he washed up, massaged his leg, shoulder, and arm for a time, and removed himself a good distance from the trail to make his camp. He fell to sleep with a feeling of satisfaction.

In the morning he dined on berries and water from the river. A few days of steady travel and he'd be accustomed to swinging along with the crutch, he felt. There was a rhythm to it which he was beginning to pick up, and he knew that he was making better time upright, and with less effort.

Each stride took him farther from the Ree and nearer to Sioux country. They called them Dakotas up here. Same thing, though. They'd trust him all right. Henry's boys had always gotten on well with the Sioux. The closer he got to the Cheyenne River and the farther from the Moreau the better he felt. Hard to judge how many days it would take to really be into their country. If it were a few weeks later, with less foliage on the trees, he'd have a better view westward. Could catch a glimpse of the Black Hills then, to know better where he was. At least he knew where he was headed. He'd come a good distance toward Ft. Kiowa, and while it was still a long way off he'd come into a much more congenial piece of countryside. And his strength was beginning to return. Already, long stretches of his inchworm progress had taken on the fragmented quality of dreaming…

He tried to think about meanness—from Lafitte and the Pawnee women to Jamie—but his spirits were too high. So he just set his mind to rising and falling with the swells like a ship at anchor, and the day passed through, along with pieces of Pennsylvania, the West Indies, and the mountains, most of them involving days such as this.

He slept deeply that night and did not remember any dreams. In the morning, though, as he headed to the river to bathe and seek after berries and roots, he found a succession of stripped berry bushes, bear tracks and bear scat about the area. This upset him for a long while. That night, after a good day's travel, he dreamed again of the bear, crushing him, breathing into him, with a certain feeling of urgency, as if it were trying to pull him back, to that time, that place, to do it all again, this time not to let him get away. He awoke sweating and shaking. He sought the shadows and sniffed the air, but he was alone in the night. Later, he slept again.

There was no bear sign the next day, and several times it rained causing him to take refuge among the trees. The going was slower because of the mud this produced, and his fear of falling. He was unable to take any fish and dined entirely on roots.

The following day the land began to rise about him, assuming rougher, more hilly features. Eventually, he moved among bluffs and the river was inconveniently low to his left. Still, he crossed the streams and creeks which fed it, and he speared fish, bathed, and drank from these. It seemed to his recollection that this terrain marked the edges of the valley of the Cheyenne. A day or so here and it would be an easy, downhill walk into the safety of that place.

...And the pain in his hip was better than it had been since the bear. Even the leg was beginning to feel a little stronger. Every time he inadvertently put weight on it there had been twinges, but none of the terrible pains of a break. Even these had eased during the past few days, so that he began to wonder whether it might have healed to the point where it could bear his weight for a few paces. Gingerly, he began to experiment. A little weight... Not bad. A little more. Still all right. Bit of a twinge there. Try again.

The next morning, as he took his way down a slope, he heard the sound of horses. Immediately he headed for cover.

Two mounted Indians rounded the bend and, from an exclamation one of them uttered, he knew he had been seen. A moment later, two pack horses made the turn, and it sounded as if more were coming behind them. Hugh halted and turned as the foremost reached for his rifle.

He faced them, raising his left hand, open palm facing them. Two more riders rounded the bend, also leading horses loaded with baskets and bags. These riders also reached for their weapons.

As they approached, Hugh grew certain they were Sioux. Thinking again of human cussedness, he waited until they drew near and halted, rifles still upon him.

Then he said, "Hugh Glass," and added "friend" in their language.

Notes

Zelazny contributed this story to an anthology and to the collaborative novel *Wilderness*. Slated for prior publication, the anthology was delayed, and *Wilderness* preceded it. This short story comprises two excerpts from the novel: the first starts as the bear mauls Glass, and the second takes place several weeks into his crawling journey.

Zelazny mentions several Native American and First Nations tribes. Around the time of this story the **Arikara** (also Arikaree, **Rickaree**, **Ree**) lived in South Dakota; **Sioux** or **Dakotas** lived in the upper Mississippi Valley and surrounding plains; **Pawnee** occupied Nebraska; **Cheyenne** lived between the Missouri and Arkansas rivers; **Assiniboine** inhabited Southern Manitoba; **Blackfeet** lived on the northwestern plains. The **Leavenworth campaign** of 1823 suppressed the Arikara.

Big Horn is a Wyoming mountain range. A **travois** is a sled used to carry goods, consisting of two joined poles dragged by a horse or dog. The **Platte** River in Nebraska is a tributary of the Missouri River. **Jean Lafitte**—"Gentleman Pirate of New Orleans"—was a pirate in the Gulf of Mexico in the early nineteenth century. A **cutlass** is a short sword with a slightly curved blade once favored by sailors. A **belaying pin** on a ship secures a rope. **Et** means eaten. **Braggadocio** is arrogance. The **Moreau River** in South Dakota is a tributary of the Missouri River. **Fort Kiowa** (originally Fort Lookout) was an American Fur Company trading post on the Missouri River near Oacoma, South Dakota. **Scat** is animal excrement.

WALKING, OF COURSE

Coda to *Wilderness* by Roger Zelazny and Gerald Hausman, Tor/Forge 1994.
Separately: *New Mexico Poetry Renaissance*,
eds. Sharon Niederman and Miriam Sagan, Red Crane Books 1994.

Walking, of course, away from it all,
the run and the crawl.
Walking as we must
beyond tales end, the dark,
the light, and the grey, past
reefs of bleached buffalo bone,
the seasons, the years,
the opened graves and closed,
the burnt villages and blackened plain
where time the river flows,
we look for real endings, finding none,
and graves that come and go.

John Colter died leaving

2 beds, 4 chairs, one glass tumbler,
1 dish and 5 puter plates,
1 plow, 1 hoe, one Dutch oven,
2 pie pans, 3 puter basins,
1 coffee pot, 1 little spinning wheel,
2 bottles, 4 tin cups,
knives, forks and spoons,
1 piggin, 1 pane of cotton cards,
1 flat iron, 3 books,
1 mare, 1 colt, one heffer,
1 cow and calf.

His estate, settled December 10, 1813,
was valued at $233.76-¾
after his debts had been paid,
and, in an unmarked grave on Tunnel Hill,
outside St. Louis was he laid, later forgotten,
and used as landfill,
becoming part of the track bed
of the Missouri Pacific Railway.

None knows where Old Hugh
came to rest, though Jamie Bridger'd
a Wyoming fort to bear his name.

Walking then away from it all
down endless caverns,
through citied futures,
one finds, as at the end of every trail,
a skull. Whose, is hardly important,
but that into the coming together place
where time crosses the world, it held
the act of continual passion,
granting meaning to the bright moment
of its execution, beneath sun, sky, stars,
where lives and futures fuse,
turning courses away from the greater darkness,
signing the earth with the long pressure of its gaze.

Walking, you see them painted now
in ancient halls of the Earth;
walking, you see them all painted,
deep, on the walls of the cave.

Notes

Puter is a deliberate misspelling of pewter, an alloy composed of tin and other metals. A **piggin** is small wooden dipper with a handle formed by continuing one of the staves above the rim. **Heffer** is a deliberate misspelling of heifer, a young virgin cow.

SPINNING THE DAY THROUGH MY HEAD

To Spin Is Miracle Cat, Underwood-Miller 1981.
Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky*.

Nothing above.
Nothing below.
Here is my heart.
Where shall I go?

Nothing behind.
Nothing before.
Here is my brain.
Where is the door?

Nothing to left.
Nothing to right.
Here is my song.
Where is the light?

There is no door.
There is no light.
Go with the song,
Else all is night.

TUNNEL VISION

Galaxy #3, May/June 1994.

It flew, thing of fiery feather and shimmering underside, occasionally changing shape in its passage through the brilliant void toward the blazing flower about which the others circled. It shed a fearful trail and looked backwards often. Several times, its movement grew erratic but always it recovered and headed on till at length it fell into orbit about the rootless, flaming bloom, then glided, absorbing the healing emanations of that place.

At length—though time meant little here—another such as itself altered its circling course and came to parallel its passage.

"Loxas," said the other, "your colors are wrong. What is the matter?"

"Tork," replied the first, "I have seen such things as I never knew nor heard of, and I am no longer the same as before I grazed the destroying vortex."

"Be grateful you survive to recall it. What happened?"

"I was careless and did not note its approach until it was too late. I was struck, obliquely, and my senses spun away from me. When they returned I found myself being drawn down a long tunnel which darkened as I went. Finally, it took me to a great cave where creatures whose beings were divided into two sorts dwelled. Always they faced to the rear of the cave, observing the shadows that passed there, unwilling or unable to turn and regard the cavemouth beyond which wonders lay. I felt myself drawn to one sort of the creature—big-bellied, it was, and within I could see where it was growing a smaller version of itself. I was overwhelmed then by a desire to enter there and become that smaller creature. As I advanced upon it, I was suddenly halted, and a voice said, 'No. It is not yet your time. You must return.' Then I was hurled back up the tunnel toward the light where I emerged. I came here to repair myself and to meditate upon it. Have you ever heard of such a thing?"

"Yes," Tork replied. "Others have undergone it from time to time, though it is not at all a common occurrence. I have overheard the Elders discussing the phenomenon. What you saw and felt is a thing that is known as a near-life experience."

EPITHALAMIUM

Fantastic Alice, ed. Margaret Weis and Martin H. Greenberg, Ace 1995.

It rained that night and the old lady made tea, as was generally the case. Sipping it, there at the kitchen table, she looked back over her quiet life. Memories of childhood came to fascinate her, and she wondered again at the quietude that had followed. Though she'd inherited the house and received a small stipend from a trust fund and had traveled considerably she'd never found the right man; or vice versa. The game was about over for her now, though she'd never really been invited to play. There had been nothing of great interest or reminder save for a few visits with the man who hunted people, and the last of these had been years ago. Now…Now it was peaceful to drink her tea and listen to the rain, to reflect on the complexity of existence and one's own useless role in most of it. She had done a lot of volunteer work, read a lot of books, remembered the wars. She'd been a nurse in both of them, though the second time had involved luck, expediency, and a need that transcended age. Well, there had been one man, back in the first war, she recalled—a quiet British lieutenant named Colin. They might have been happy together, she mused, but the fields of Flanders had eaten him, along with so many others.

She moved to the other room and stoked the fire, adding a few sticks, as she meant to take a second cup of tea in the parlor.

Halfway through the cup and some old thoughts, the doorbell rang. She glanced at the clock. It was near midnight.

She rose and crossed the room, opening the door partway.

" 'Evening, Miss Alice," he said. "Axel J. Beangern at your service. I was wondering whether we might use it tonight."

"Goodness! I don't know whether it's still working," she said, opening the door more widely. "Come in out of the rain."

Beangern, as always, was clad in brown leather. He wore a hunting knife on his belt, a pistol on his right hip, and he carried a shotgun in his hand.

"Why the shotgun?" she asked.

"It slows him down," Beangern said.

With that, he pushed in his prisoner—a tall, slim, dark-eyed, dark-haired fellow clad in black. He was handcuffed and he wore leg irons as well.

"Evening, Miss Alice," he said. "It's been a long time."

"Indeed it has, Lucer," she responded.

He smiled, raised his hands, and the right one incandesced.

"You cut that out, Lucer," Beangern said to him, and the fire died.

"Just an old flame for an old flame," Lucer said.

"You always were a flirt," she responded, returning his smile. "Will you gentlemen have some tea?"

"Of course," they both replied, "on a night like this. We'll stand, though, if you don't mind. Hate to soil your furniture."

"Nonsense. I insist you sit," she said.

"He is good at guarding people when they're chained and he's standing by them with a shotgun," Lucer said.

"That is not the reason," Beangern stated.

She shrugged and returned to the kitchen. Shortly, she came back with a tray bearing two cups of tea and some biscuits. Both men were now seated.

She served them, then seated herself.

"Same as usual?" she asked.

"Pretty much," Lucer replied. "I escaped prison, came over to here, got a job, and the bounty man came after me."

"Same as usual," Beangern said. "He escaped from prison, injuring a lot of people on his way out, came here and organized a secret society dedicated to revolution and commenced buying weapons and training the members in their use. I caught him just in time."

"So what happens to him now?" Alice asked.

"I take him back," said Beangern.

"You seem the only one able to bring him back when something like this happens," Alice said.

"True. He's quite dangerous, but then so am I," Beangern said.

"This is all a lie," Lucer said. "But I haven't yet seen the truth make any difference."

"I'd listen," Alice said.

"I'm sorry," said Beangern, "but he hasn't the time to tell you all of his lies. We must be departing soon."

"He's like a samurai," Lucer said. "Terribly well-trained and true to his code—whatever it is. If you tried to detain him, he might do you harm."

"I would not," said Beangern. "Alice is an old friend."

"Very old," Alice said.

"Why do you keep escaping if it always comes to this?" she asked Lucer.

"It will not. This is the last time," Lucer replied.

"Oh, why is that?"

"Because the cycle is at an end."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Of course not. But I have eaten the Whitcomb Pie and know that it is so."

"Whatever you say," she said, pouring more tea for them all. "My part in your business ended long ago."

Lucer laughed.

"Callooh! Callooh!" he said. "The story never ends."

Beangern laughed, too.

"It will end very soon," he said.

"In a way, callay! In a way," the other said.

"So long as Beangern holds his fief, the world runs well," Beangern said.

"Well, it runs," Lucer acknowledged, "with the lunatics in charge, as you left them."

Beangern chuckled.

"I find this vastly amusing," he said. "And surely Alice remembers."

"How could I not?" she said. "There were times when it terrified me."

"And there were times when it showed you wonders such as few of your world have ever seen," Lucer added.

"I can't deny it. But they don't balance."

"What of it? It has changed considerably since your visit—and tonight it shall change again."

"From what to what?" she asked.

"It must be seen," Beangern replied.

"At my age it no longer matters."

"On the contrary. It means a great deal that you be present for the enactment and return. There was a reason you were tempted to visit us so long ago, Alice."

Lucer snorted and his chains rattled. Beangern sipped his tea.

"You were brought in to be viewed by your prospective husband," he said.

"Oh, and who might that have been?"

"The real ruler of the place."

"I'm a little old for that part now. If someone like that wanted me, he should have done something about it a long time ago."

"Events," said Beangern, "rose to spoil his plans."

"What events?"

"A small war."

She sipped her tea.

"So you must accompany us on this special occasion."

"Sorry. The story is ended now," she said. "Over. Done with. You've come too late."

"It is never too late," Beangern said, "while I live. And I will not die."

He ate a biscuit. Lucer sipped his tea.

"Will I?" Beangern suddenly asked.

"Whom are you asking?" said Lucer.

"You."

"You fear this night," the other replied, "that it holds your death."

"Well, does it?"

"Even if I knew I wouldn't tell you."

Beangern began to raise his shotgun, glanced at Alice, and lowered it again. He ate another biscuit.

"Quite good," he remarked.

"There is still the enactment," Lucer stated.

"Hush now."

"Of course. It matters not."

"What is this enactment?" Alice asked.

"It is a ritual in which the fallen star Beangern must participate. Else will he be swept away."

"Nonsense!" Beangern roared, spilling tea on his jacket. "I perform the rite for old times' sake. Nothing more."

"What rite?" Alice inquired.

"The ritual of return to the heavens from which he came," said Lucer. "On Yuleki's Day. His place has been vacant too long."

"You make him sound like a god," Alice said.

"He is, like one of the god kings of old in your world."

"I thought that the Red King and Queen—or the White," Alice began.

"There were many lunatics in Wonderland," Lucer responded. "Beangern sent many of them into strong exile or imprisonment and rules now himself."

"Is that true?" Alice asked.

"The man exaggerates," Beangern replied. "The Red King and Queen still rule. I occasionally assist."

"And what is the part you would have me play in all this?" asked Alice.

"A small one," Beangern replied.

"He lies," said Lucer.

"What then?" asked Alice.

"Witness," Beangern replied.

"I am an old lady you have confused considerably," Alice said. "I'll have no more of this rabbitholing and mirroring. Let us finish our tea and I'll see you off."

"Of course," Beangern stated. "Come, Lucer. Drink up, and we'll be on our way."

The men finished their tea and Lucer took another biscuit. Both men rose then, and Beangern looked toward Alice. "Would you conduct us to the conveyance now?" he said.

"You mean the mirror?"

"Yes."

"Come this way," Alice said.

Rising, she led them to a flight of stairs and took them up it. Pushing back a hatch and throwing a light switch, she illuminated a low-wattage bulb, which revealed a dusty attic filled with the detritus of decades. At the room's far end hung a mirror, its reflective surface facing the wall.

Alice halted and suddenly asked, "Why do you need it? You obviously got here without it."

"The other way is strenuous," Beangern replied, "and subduing this fellow takes a lot out of one. The other reason is convenience."

"Convenience?" Alice said.

"Yes," Beangern replied. "On the night of Yuleki in the place where the kinyon grass grows, and the Ulb who ate a Jabberwock goes forbling forth to vie, with Kibling and Dars Dadisdada, 'tis soon enough to die, Ryanda! Step through, Lucer!"

He nudged the other man with the shotgun barrel. Lucer approached the mirror and vanished.

"I'm not going back to that place," Alice said.

Beangern laughed and stepped through the mirror. Shortly afterwards, Alice felt herself drawn toward it. She tried to resist but the effect was too strong. Step after resisting step, she was forced to advance until she stood before it and, after all these years, entered.

She stood for several moments within the reversed image of her attic. Then she turned, seeking the mirror, but could not find it. She knew then that she must depart the attic. Turning, she crossed the room, switched off the light, and descended the stair.

She made her way to the back door, opened it, and stepped outside.

It was no longer her garden. It had become a glade in the midst of sunset, two roads emerging from the trees to cross at its center. Beangern stood on the crossroad, shotgun still a-smoke. Lucer lay panting at his feet.

"Tried to escape," Beangern said. "I expected it."

"Is he going to be—all right?" Alice asked, moving to the man's side and kneeling, her nursing training returning in a great rush through her mind.

"Of course," Beangern replied. "He's healing already. Practically impervious. And stronger than an ox. Stronger than me, even. Lacks my combat training, though."

"How do you know these things about him?" she asked.

"He used to be my servant, my man-at-arms. We came here together."

"From where?" she said.

He pointed skyward. "Up there. I am of the fallen star they could not return."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Some metaphysical crime for which the others would never release him, should he come into their power," Lucer moaned.

"Nonsense. 'Twas a mere difference of opinion we had," Beangern stated.

Lucer rose slowly to his feet, hand pressed against his side. "That does smart," he remarked.

"Tell her that you lied," Beangern stated.

"I will not. 'Tis true."

"I'll blast you again."

"Go ahead. Waste our time. Callooh."

"Callay. She'll see for herself this day."

"This night, I say. Away. Let's away."

"By the bye, I say. A little rite to light our way."

With that, he commenced a series of arcane hand movements. The air seemed to brighten about him as he did. Finally, he stopped and indicated that the journey was to continue.

"What was that all about?" Alice asked.

"Dars Dadisdada and Rottery Khan will be riding out tonight," Beangern said.

"…And the Choipery Girl will circle the world on wings like a bat," said Lucer. "The Challkers Rose will rise from the sea and bloom, and the foongli lights dance on bay and slope. A reminiscence of your Halloween, and a ritual protection against it."

"It would seem that things have changed," she said.

"Just the names," said Beangern.

"More than just the names," said Lucer.

"I would like to be returned to my home now," said Alice.

"I am afraid that that is impossible," said Beangern. "You are needed here."

"Why?"

"This will become apparent later."

"I may choose to withhold my cooperation."

"I think not," said Beangern, raising a small whistle which he wore on a chain about his neck. He put it to his lips and blew upon it.

A minute passed.

"I think I am going to go back," Alice said.

"Impossible," Beangern replied, and in the distance a low rumble rose up.

She listened for a moment, then asked, "What is that sound?"

"Motorcycles," he replied. "Members of the royal guard—the Twittikins—are on their way."

"That was an awfully quick response," she remarked as their shapes came into view on the road ahead.

"Actually, I whistled for them before I left. This one is a new request, for later. You must recall that one can run and get nowhere, or stay in place and make progress—or phone to speak with yourself yesterday."

"Well, somewhat."

"It has its fine points. That's all."

The bikers approached, drew near. When they halted before them, Beangern approached their leader, a big-bellied man with arms like tree trunks. He wore blue jeans, a black leather vest, and hordes of tattoos. His scarred face broke into a smile.

"Someone you want done for?" he asked Beangern.

"Just guarded," Beangern said. "Miss Alice here."

"Why, she's just an old bag. Why's she need guardin'?"

"Watch your language, Nik. She's a friend of mine. But we can't let her go until tomorrow. So hang around and keep an eye on her. She's got an odd element of probability calls."

"What's that mean?"

"Funny things used to happen around her. They still could, in this place."

The Twittikins advanced to be near her. Above them, amid the branches of a nearby tree, she thought for a moment that she spied the form of a grinning cat.

"Let's be movin' along now," Beangern said.

"Where to?" asked Lucer.

"Why, the palace, of course. To get a fresh judgment pronounced against you."

"Yes, for they do get stale, I know," Lucer said, "like moldy bread."

Beangern laughed. "We'll find you some fresh words to chew over," he said, "in a fresh cell, where mold and oxidation enter not."

"No, for tonight is a very special night, demon star."

"Lucer, you wrong me."

They began walking.

"If that way be north today, we'll be to the palace shortly after sunset," Lucer remarked.

Alice moved nearer.

"There is something about him," she said, "that seems even more abnormal than usual."

"Oh, he's certifiable material, all right," Lucer said, "like most of us. But he's grown too dangerous to buck. And his powers are at a peak come Yuleki."

"And your own?" she asked. "You do seem to have a few of those yourself."

"True," he said. "One never knows how things will fall out in this place. Callooh!"

"Callay!" she responded, smiling. "Are we both crazy, Lucer?"

"Maybe a little," he replied.

"What about letting the prisoners talk?" Nik hollered.

"Let them," Beangern said. "It doesn't matter."

They trekked into the twilight, away from the setting sun.

"Things are a little different this time," Lucer told Alice. "I think they want everything legal and proper."

"What does that mean—in this place?" she asked.

"He'll get the King and Queen to say that it's okay to send me to the mines, that you must attend the rite of Yuleki, and that Beangern's fief remains secure."

"That makes him the real ruler here, doesn't it?"

"I'd say so."

"Does that mean that he was the one who'd summoned me and observed me years ago, looking for the bride he never married?"

"Yes. I was with him at the time. Hidden, he observed all your adventures."

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

"To see how you responded to such unusual stresses."

"Why that?"

"Should you come to reign here, it would be useful to know how you dealt with the environment."

"And I failed."

"No. There was a war here as well as in your world. It caused such things to be bypassed until too late."

"You're saying I should have been queen."

"Empress."

"...To Beangern."

"Undoubtedly."

"In that case, I'm glad things fell out as they did."

"And I, also. I don't think you'd really have liked it."

"What now?"

"There seems to be no choice. We go through with it. I've a feeling I'll have a part in this one since it's the ending of a celestial cycle and the beginning of a new one, and spirits may mount or descend."

"I don't understand."

"Natural laws in this place. If we ever have an opportunity longer than this, I'll try to explain."

"Why not try it now?"

"Because that bulk up ahead is the castle, and we'll be there before very long. Suffice it to say that Beangern is a stellar spirit who fell to earth at the last major cycle. He saw that this place was a looney bin, and he took it over and set it right."

"Why, then, do you oppose him?"

"He went too far. Now it is a matter of his whim, rather than law or principle, that rules. Perhaps he has gone truly mad. He fears that the Feast of Yuleki, the Yark Angel, may be a time when he could be drawn back to his true realm, never to return."

"You'd think that would make him happy."

"Yes, but it doesn't. He likes it here. He has near fought Yuleki himself over this point."

"This is good?"

"For everyone here there was some good at first."

"Except me," she said.

"Don't say that. You are necessary."

"For what?"

"It must have seemed different to you when you were but a girl, but your adventures then can be viewed in two different ways."

"Oh. I stumbled into a magical kingdom and had some strange experiences. That's how I view it. You have an alternative?"

"Yes. How do you like this one? You were the magical being that entered here. You, as observer, precipitated all the strange experiences you had."

"That is certainly a novel way of regarding it."

"I think you had it, and that you still might."

"What does it mean if I do?"

"You might be able to help to expel him, this time of all times. Everything else will be poised for such a thrust."

"You sure such a thing will work?"

"No, but if we don't try it now it may be eons before another chance occurs. Not all of the royalists will be left. Perhaps not any."

"Let me think about it."

"Better think fast."

They continued their trek to the Castle of Hearts. Beangern told the first person he saw—a short, red-haired gardener—to announce his arrival. The man ran off screaming, "Beangern has come! Beangern has come!"

"I find their enthusiasm touching," Beangern remarked. "Come, let us enter. We shall hunt down their majesties."

Beangern drove the others ahead of him now, lest Lucer free himself and lead Alice astray. He left the Twittikins to guard the gate. He located the King and Queen dressed in rags and hiding beneath the bed in a fourth-floor bedroom.

"Why do we find them so?" Alice asked.

"Guards! Protect us! Off with his head! Beangern! Beangern! Dead! Dead! Dead!" cried the emaciated Queen of Hearts and her diminutive husband.

"They have conceived some ill fancy of me," Beangern replied, his eyes flashing fire, "and compounded it with their tendency to shirk their duties. Come now! Both of you! Out of there! There's a royal decree in need of issuing."

"Why us? Why us?"

"Because you're royal. The decretals need decreting, the world it needs its words, Lord Lucer to the mines again, Beangern to his fiefdom, Alice to her Judgment Chair. Write it down! Write it down! Sign it at the bottom! Circulate the ruddy 'crete to everything alive! And save a ruddy copy for the bloody archive!"

"Scrivener! Scrivener!" cried the Queen,

"Why call only two?" asked the King. "Make it more plural."

"'S, 's," added the Queen.

"Sounds like a tired serpent," said the King.

"Retired servants claim pensions," said the Queen. "What has this to do with them? And what has become of them? What? What?"

"The mines!" cried Lucer. "To save on pay. Release them, release them, release them, pray!"

"This cannot be," said the Queen. "Who would order such?"

Lucer turned and stared at Beangern.

"You liked them overmuch," said the man.

"Release them!"

"Not today."

"Where are our robes royal?"

"In the laundry."

"You sold them. You're disloyal," said the King.

"And the Jewels of the Crown?" asked the Queen.

"On exhibition in the town."

"Lies! Lies! You've robbed us. Bring them back! Bring them back!"

"I hear the scriveners in the hall," said Beangern. "Let us set them up, and tell them what I say."

"I think we do not need your help. We'll do it our own way."

"In that case friends and favorites will be the ones to pay," Beangern said, as he raised his whistle.

"Stop!" cried the King. "We'll do as you say."

"I thought you'd see the light. It must be done tonight. Now, as a matter of fact."

He opened the door and let them in. There were four.

"You lack tact. But you hold the winning cards," said the Queen.

"…Lucer Starborn is hereby reassigned to the mines. All other political imprisonments are reconfirmed. Axel J. Beangern is reconfirmed in the possession of his fief—" Beangern said.

"That," Lucer said, "is contingent on your sitting through the Feast of Yuleki in the chapel on your property."

"I know that!"

"Very well. Write it down."

"…And Alice finally present on this night of all nights of the year."

"I know no fear!" said Beangern.

"None spoke of fear but thee."

"This is not part of the decree!" Beangern shouted. "Add the salutatories and affirmations to what has gone before, and be damned with them!"

"Such language!" said Alice.

"He's not at all a gentleman," said Lucer.

"Execute the order! Return him to the pits!" cried Beangern.

"I claim my right to be present at the service," said Lucer.

"Bring him along, then. We'll send him from there when it's done."

Lucer raised his hand and squeezed one of Alice's. "I am to be myself this night," he said, "and likely he will not."

"This is good?" she asked.

"Rejoice and honest be," Lucer replied, "and we shall make it so, come St. George and Low Heaven."

"I fear that I do not understand."

"You will when the time's at hand."

"But Beangern always seemed the gentleman, and you the criminal—though a very polite one."

"He lies. You've seen how he deals. In fact, he also steals."

"I believe. He does deceive."

"Soon we will leave, for the service. Are you hungry? He would see that you are fed, if you are. Wants you strong."

"I'll come along without the bread. I don't know that I care to brave a meal in this place now."

"Why should that be bad?"

"Because everyone's half-mad."

"Yes, but they're half-sane, too."

"I'm on your side. Enough said. Callooh!"

"Callay!"

"Let's be away!" cried Beangern.

They left the castle and the day. They traveled through the hilly lands, to the realm of Whileaway.

"Sing for me, Alice," said Lucer, and she began "Auld Lang Syne."

The Twittikins roared on ahead and behind, the moon dripped butter and venom, and everywhere she looked, it seemed the cat's grin was upon her. A cool, near chill breeze swept them, and all the shadows became a blanket of black.

The moonlight sparkled on a massive block of ice to the right of the trail. They examined it as they passed, and Alice's voice wavered as she beheld within it—frozen in mid-gesture—a March Hare, a Dormouse, and a demented-looking Hatter.

As they crossed the next hill she heard a great, crystal-like shattering, though no one else seemed to.

"Sing more loudly here," Lucer said, and she did. A snuffling, chuffling, snorting followed, as of a laboring walrus climbing a slope. Again, nobody else seemed to notice.

"And at this glade you must sing with particular sweetness," he said.

She did, and the chortling roar that near shook the darkness from the night seemed heard by everyone, from the automatic weapon fire that followed from the Twittikins. The rearmost vanished and their weapons grew still as a dark cloud swept across the road, passing over them.

"Lucer," she whispered, seizing his biceps, "what is it you have me doing?"

"Sorry, naught but pure song, m'lady. Think, think back on all you remember from your earliest visits. If there was aught that you loved, sing to that. Remember, remember, Alice, this place as it was."

And Alice's old voice broke, many, many times, as she recalled and reworded old ballads and music hall songs.

"What is that caterwauling?" Beangern cried, his ears now long and silky, his mouth more full of teeth than before.

"Lady Alice would sing," Lucer replied, "as is her right."

Beangern growled and grew silent.

"He must allow it," Lucer said. "You must unscathed be."

"Why?" she asked.

"Your power is sacrosanct," said he. "You are she who came long ago."

"A lifetime wasn't that far back," she said.

"In this place time doth different flow."

"I'll never understand."

"I say you will. Pray, sing on."

And again she sang. This time, the night came alive with bird cries, cricket calls, and the rustling of leaves. Overhead, the stars shone more brightly than Alice had ever seen them glow, and the moon seemed to swell as it made its slow way zenithward.

"Confound!" Beangern cried, his trousers now split to free his jointed tail, eyes still flashing fire.

"Sing on," said Lucer, and she did.

At last, they reached the top of a high hill, overlooking a vale splashed with moonlight like buttermilk. At their back, Alice heard noises. Beangern called a halt and regarded the prospect for a moment. He raised his right arm and extended a claw. "This is the place where music comes to die," he said. "This is the fief of Beangern. My powers increase here."

"…And your form seems to have shifted," Alice said.

"Tonight 'tis unavoidable," he said, "when the Powers descend and rise to walk the world."

"I thought that Beangern was a god or demigod. Your form seems more demonic."

"These terms are meaningless in this twisted place," said he, "and as for the rest, read your Nietzsche."

"I understand," said she.

"So I have won, you see. I made you wait till your powers waned and drained. A draft of damp air would blow you away."

"You've watched me all these years?"

"Indeed, through laughter and tears."

"Not too much laughter."

"Nor many tears. Sorry 'tis such a bland life you've led. But so it had to be."

"All for this night?"

"All for this night."

The crest on his backbone rose to a ridge on his head. His hoofs clattered against rocks as he shifted position.

He pointed again. "And there is the chapel, in yonder valley."

They saw the diminutive building, all alight.

"Come," he finally said. "Tonight is indeed the night."

They followed him down the hillside and through the twisting ways of the valley—Beangern, Alice, Lucer, the King and Queen of Hearts, the Twittikin, unassorted courtiers and nobles. The Twittikins were again diminished, in a firefight with something that had howled from behind a boulder. When they searched the area afterwards, nothing could be found.

Great numbers of dark birds passed overhead as they advanced upon the chapel, and there were rustlings within the high grasses all about them. The earth seemed to tremble on several occasions, and deadwood snapped as heavier footfalls occurred.

Lucer had hold of her arm now and she had a stick in her other hand. She leaned on both.

"Not too much farther to the chapel," Lucer remarked. "You'll be able to rest once we've arrived."

"I'll make it," she said. "I must see the story through."

"I'm sure you will. Your presence is necessary, either way," said he. "You are she who came."

"Win or lose? Live or dead?"

"Exactly."

An owl dipped above them. "Who?" it asked.

"Me," she answered.

Beangern growled, and birds fell dead from the sky. The earth shook and the wind grew stronger. At last they reached the chapel and Beangern let them in. The place was filled with candlelight, there was a low altar against the forward wall, and a circular skylight poured starshine and the glow of the rising moon down upon the pentagram drawn on the floor beneath. Against the chapel's rear wall was a throne all of red stone, and to this Alice was led.

"Pray, rest yourself!" cried Beangern, and the ground shook as he increased in stature. He moved forward then, motioning the others to seat themselves in pews. Lucer and the King and Queen he allowed to remain near Alice. He moved then to the front of the chapel, and, looking upward, addressed some unseen presence beyond the skylight:

"You up there. This is Beangern," he said. "I know you can hear me, tonight. All right. Tonight is the night, but I want you to know that I hold everything in the palm of my hand. You waste your time if you think that you can do much about it. I know you've been waiting to nail me, Yuleki, but it's too damned late. I've been sucking power out of this land down the years. I'm too strong for you now. One touch more, and the world I have set up will endure forever."

"Alice," Lucer said softly, "I am going to break these chains now and fight him. We are of about equal strength but I will lose because his technique is better. When I appear to be going down for the third time, cry out for Yuleki to come to you. And use your name."

"Why are you as strong as that thing he has become?" she asked.

"I forget."

"...And why is his technique better?"

"Not sure. No matter."

"Then why must you fight?"

"I must hold him till the moon is higher."

"Why?"

"I don't remember. But it will help us against him."

"…Now, on this night of all nights of the year," Beangern intoned, "we are gathered together in the eyes of Yuleki and anyone else who cares to look, and we will join in matrimony the master and lady of this place."

"Lady?" Alice said. "Where is she?"

"That's you," Lucer answered, raising his hands and spreading them. He drew them taut and beads of perspiration broke out upon his brow. Then the chains snapped and he bent to draw upon those which held his ankles.

Beangern raised his shotgun. Alice moved to stand before Lucer.

"Damn it, lady! Get out of the way!" Beangern cried.

"No," Alice replied. "Something's wrong here and I want to see it right."

"You're going about it wrong!" he roared.

Lucer's chains broke and he rose to his full height. Beangern sighed. "All right. We must settle this yet again," he said.

Lucer advanced to the center of the chapel and Beangern set aside the shotgun and moved to meet him.

A flash of lightning crossed the sky as they met. Then the two were rolling about the pentagram.

The door to the chapel was opened and the figure of a White Rabbit entered. Alice thought that she heard him mutter, "Oh dear!" as he seated himself in a pew near the front. He watched the fray as the two combatants struck, their fists shattering brick, stone, or flagging when they missed each other.

Finally, she felt the rabbit's gaze upon her. He stared for a long while before his eves widened in recognition. She nodded then.

The Rabbit rose and made his way slowly along the lefthand wall. When he came to the throne he said, "Alice."

"How's the Dormouse?" she asked.

"Still in the teapot. How are you?"

"Oh, time has taken its ticket for the show," she said. "And yourself?"

"You freed me earlier with your singing."

"What? How?"

"You're magic. You must know that by now. I was with the Jabberwock after you sang him loose. He's waiting outside to eat Beangern if he can."

The Rabbit's eyes turned toward the combatants. "Tough pair, those two. Hard to tell which is master or man."

"Not for me. Beangern has ceased to be a man."

"He will always be a mere man-at-arms among the skiey hosts."

"What are you saying? He is a fallen star—a higher being whose contact with this world may have corrupted him."

The Queen of Hearts shrieked as the combatants rolled near to her, Beangern's horns scoring the stone at her feet. Then the combatants rolled away again.

"Lord Lucer is the fallen star," replied the Rabbit, "who must be made this night to remember himself. Beangern was his servant, who usurped his place when the forgetfulness fell upon Lucer."

"What?" cried Alice. "Beangern an imposter?"

"Indeed. Now that you've freed me, I hope to see him pass one way or the other this night."

There came a crash as the two men struck the wall and the building shook.

"Why does Beangern outclass his boss?" Alice asked.

"A man-at-arms has special combat training, for service against the dark legions," replied the rabbit.

It seemed that Beangern and Lucer hammered upon each other forever, as the moon rose higher and higher. Then Beangern's blows began to appear more telling, and finally he knelt upon Lucer, and, catching hold of his head, began to bang it upon the stone floor. Seeing this, Alice cried out, "Yuleki, Yark Angel, help us now! This is Alice calling." Then she moved toward them.

With a flash, a ball of white light appeared above the pentagram. Beangern rose and faced it, leaving a panting, bleeding figure upon the floor.

"It is not fair that you should come for me now, Yuleki!" he cried. "I am tired and cannot face you properly!"

"All the better then," a musical voice rang out. "Transform! You lose no face by coming along with me without strife."

Beangern glanced at Lucer. "Do you remember?" he called out.

"Remember what?" Lucer responded.

Beangern looked back at Yuleki. "I maintain my battle mode and we fight," he said.

"Very well."

He plunged forward. When he made contact with the bright sphere, it raised him above the ground, spun him round like a whirlwind, then slammed him down upon the stone. It drifted into a position above his chest. He attempted to raise his arms and legs and could not.

"You should have made it last longer," he whispered, "for his sake. I have been trying to cure him for decades. I thought that this might do it. I wanted him whole, so that he could be returned."

"My plan was otherwise."

Beangern turned his head toward Lucer. "Master!" he cried. "Remember! Please!"

"I do, faithful servant," came the response; and Lucer took Alice's hand in his own. A faint glow suddenly surrounded her.

"Your job here is done," Yuleki said to Beangern. "But his is not, though he is whole again. He will repair this land, which you sacrificed in the cause of his healing."

"I could help him!"

"That would not be prudent. Their memories of you are bad."

There followed a crash of thunder and both Beangern and the light were gone.

Alice felt the years fall away as her odd aura strengthened.

"What is happening?" she asked.

Lucer drew her to her feet.

"I take you back along the years to your youth, old friend," he said. "By the way, there really should be a wedding tonight. Are you game?"

"Are you serious?"

"Indeed I am. I do want your help as well as your company. After all, you are the true goddess of this place."

"This is too much," she said, staring at the back of her hand as the wrinkles faded. "I'll never understand."

"Come with me."

He walked to the door of the chapel and flung it open. They were all there, Humpty and the grinning Cat, the Dormouse and the Hatter, the March Hare, the Walrus and the Jabberwock. The Choipery Girl passed overhead. A great cry rose up.

"Lucer and Alice! Lucer and Alice!"

"This seems as good a place as any," he said. "Will you have me, Alice?"

She looked out over the multitude of creatures, many still arriving. Then the Queen said, "Do it, Alice. I know we need you. Beangern's fief is yours now, of course. Do it."

Alice looked at Lucer, looked at the crowd, then back at Lucer.

"You're all mad," she said. "But so am I."

Music fell from the skies. Looking up, she saw a small star rising through the spheres to the empyrean.

Notes

An **epithalamium** is a bridal song. Zelazny occasionally alluded to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*; in this story he imagines what happens to Alice after she grew up.

Characters from Alice's adventures appear here, with Zelazny's additions. The style with its frequent rhymes evokes Carroll's. **Axel J. Beangern** and **Lucer** are not from Carroll. Lucer appears to be Lucifer, the archangel cast out from heaven; here he has forgotten his true identity until near the end. **Beangern** is a minor devil. Demons have corrupted the Alice story. **Fields of Flanders** refers to the terrible WWI battle at Ypres and the soldiers buried there; it also refers to the famous poem "In Flanders Fields," by Canadian soldier John McCrae, anguished over lost comrades buried under the poppy fields (starting the tradition of wearing poppies to honor war dead). **Incandesced** means that his arm glowed and warmed. **Whitcomb pie** refers to the poem "Our Hired Girl" by James Whitcomb Riley: the working girl's pies attract her beau with their aroma.

Callooh Callay are nonsense words from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky"; Zelazny also alluded to that poem in "Divine Madness." The **Queen of Hearts** (a playing card) screams *"off with his head!"* in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* but the **Red King and Queen** (chess pieces) are different characters from *Through the Looking-Glass.*

Coined word **yuleki** echoes Yuletide; other words made up in Carroll's style include **Kibling and Dars Dadisdada**, **Rottery Khan**, **Choipery Girl**, **Challkers Rose**, **Twittikins**, **Yark Angel**. **Kibling** might be Rudyard Kipling, **Dars Dadisdada** suggests Addis Ababa (the capitol of Ethiopia), and **Yark Angel** could be Archangel. **Decretal** or decree is a formal statement that has the force of law. **Scrivener** is a scribe. Legend says that **St. George** fought dragons. **Caterwauling** is a loud, unpleasant wailing. **Sacrosanct** means sacred. **Nietzsche** was the German philosopher who declared, "God is dead." **Empyrean** is heaven.

PARANOID GAME

Alternities #6, Summer 1981.

Paranoia is fun.
I once thought of inventing a board game
with that name.
Roll the dice. Deuce.
Go two.
Draw a card.
Your cat has died
after eating the dinner's scraps.
Go to hospital. Have your stomach pumped.
Forfeit a turn.

The possibilities are endless.
Read the instructions:
Watch out! They are all around you.
I wouldn't be too quick with those dice.
Keep an eye on the other players.
Listen.
What you do not hear is also important.
Or see, or feel, or taste,
touch, smell or kinesthese;
none of the above;
or all of these.

It is a good day.
Sort of makes you wonder.
Don't be the first to move.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be.

One of the other players has instructions
for a different game.
It is called Manic-Depressive.
He/She is watching too, just now,
but the adrenalin is rising.

When things get desperate,
you could draw a card.
Or not.
Nobody wins, of course,
but the best loser
is undefeated in a certain spiritual sense.
The way out is to draw the black card,
though it may only say "Taxes".

Something is rotten,
but Dad's ghost on the castle wall
is not to be trusted either.
(Remember the stories he used to tell?)
Offhand, I'd say there's something to do.
But you never know.
Keep your eyes open, your feet on the ground.
If it feels right, don't do it.
Watch the other players watching.

Notes

Kinesthesia is the sense that detects movement in the muscles, tendons and joints. **Something is rotten but dad's ghost on the castle wall** recalls Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

THE GOD AND FRUSTRATE SHRINE

To Spin Is Miracle Cat, Underwood-Miller 1981.
Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky*.

Tower and weep,
o steeple.
The flashing phalanx
waves
its ton of fist.

Notes

Frustrate, as an adjective, means ineffectual. A **phalanx** is a finger bone, or a body of military troops in close formation.

FOREVER AFTER
PRELUDES AND POSTLUDE

Forever After, ed. Roger Zelazny, Baen 1995.

Prelude the First

Prince Rango stepped out onto the balcony and regarded the pair of comets hung in the night sky.

Pair?

He squinted at the strange, low patch of light in the west which had not been present the previous evening. It looked pretty much the way the others had but a few nights ago. Therefore, a third comet was probably on its way. Things such as this were supposed to presage the deaths of monarchs, changes in administration, social upheavals, natural disasters, the loss of price supports in industries run by one's relatives, bad weather, plagues, and losing lottery tickets. Rango smiled. He did not need signs in the heavens to tell him that change was in the air. He was part of it.

Abruptly, an ear-tormenting squeal filled the night. It was the sound of a stringed instrument played at at least a hundred times the volume of any stringed instrument ever heard in the area. Since last night, anyway. It had been occurring in the middle of the night, on and off, for about a week, and once it fell into a regular rhythm other amplified instruments joined it. Yes. There came some sort of bass… And now a frantic drumbeat. Soon an invisible singer would begin shouting incomprehensible lyrics in an unknown language.

A tall, darkly handsome man, Rango raised his wine goblet and sipped from it as a ground-shaking thudding began somewhere to the east.

He sighed and turned his head in that direction. It had been strange enough, these past two months, living in a land that was not torn by civil war, a place that, for well over a decade, had been backdrop to assassinations, dark sorceries, skirmishes, quests, pursuits, escapes, vendettas, duels, betrayals, great acts of courage as well as treachery, all of them leading at last to a war in which the line was finally drawn and Good and Evil, Light and Dark, Order and Chaos, and all those other antonyms had faced off and had it out, steel against steel, spell against spell, dark gods and goddesses against their brighter relatives, toe to toe and hand to hand, the world red in tooth and claw and other combative appendages. When the dust settled, Good—in the person of himself and his followers—had just managed to squeak by.

Rango lowered his goblet and smiled. It had been touch and go there at the end, and, ultimately, nothing had gone according to the book, but he stood now in the imperial palace in Caltus, capital of the Faltane, with less than two months before the day of his wedding and coronation. Finally, with all of the perils laid to rest, he would be wed to his betrothed, the tall, dark-haired Rissa.

As the thudding sounds came more heavily out of the east—even the weird music could not completely smother them—he thought back over the years the respective adventures had taken, all rushing to culmination this past summer…

Kalaran, demigod gone bad—Fallen Sunbird of high Vallada Tahana, home of the gods—had seemed to have everything going for him on the eve of the final battle. The four things which had tipped the balance against him had been the amulet, the ring, the sword, and the scroll—Anachron, Sombrisio, Mothganger, and Gwykander.

Gar Quithnick, the turncoat *hingu* master, had succeeded in recovering the lost amulet. Its protective, magic-dampening effect had saved the defenders from Kalaran's wrath. Sombrisio, the deadly ring of power, returned from the city of the dead, Anthurus, by Rissa and her big-boned blond companion, Jancy Gaine, had actually hurt Kalaran, reducing him to physical combat with the Prince. Even so, he would have faced no problem against a mortal hero no matter how well muscled, save that that muscular arm had wielded Mothganger— a godslayer of a weapon which he and his partner Spotty Gulick had brought back from *their* quest. And then there was the scroll of Gwykander—containing the words to the ancient rite of grand exorcism—delivered from the bottom of a monster-haunted lake, and rushed to the Faltane just in time. Along with the other magical tools, it was there when it was needed. Looking back, he reflected on all the coincidences, and just plain luck, involved in the four tools being conveyed to the proper place at the proper time within minutes of each other. The outcome had truly been balanced on the edge of a blade.

A white line traced itself slowly through the heavens, expanding in the wake of whatever emitted it. Shortly, there came a distant, muffled boom from overhead, followed by a growling sound.

He shook his head. While he could tell that it was neither meteor nor comet, he had no idea what the thing was. This disturbed him more than a little. He'd had enough of unknown variables tracking muddy footprints across his life's trail these past few years.

Yet, while he did not understand the nature of the disturbance, he had a fairly good idea as to what was causing it, even knew himself to be partly responsible for it. It was of a piece with the recent showers of blood, toads, rats, with the raucous parodies of music which filled the air, with the thing which shook the earth with its heavy, approaching footsteps. Indeed, it was also connected with the recent spate of unnatural births, of two-headed sheep and calves.

He sighed and smiled. It would be all dealt with. He would figure a way, as he had figured ways to deal with everything from minor annoyances to imminent doom in recent years. He had always been very fast on his mental feet.

With a sudden, silvery agitation, the small lake at the foot of one of the northern hills began to drain over its eastern edge, as if the land had suddenly been tipped. He nodded. That, too. Geography tended to rearrange itself periodically these days. Just where all that water was getting off to was not readily apparent. The site of the lake would be a muddy pit in the morning. Possibly, eventually, it would became a swamp. Or it might even be a lake again by tomorrow night. The interfaces between realities having grown somewhat thin in the neighborhood of Caltus, it was possible that a stream from some other place might be diverted to refill it.

There would be a meeting. Of course. With his chief advisers. In the morning. They would discuss the situation. He could see it all now, falling into place. Yes.

He waited out of misspent curiosity until the source of the approaching footsteps came into view—an enormous, heavy-footed, long-necked, long-tailed reptile—stomping its way slowly through the center of town, browsing leaves from various trees and thatching from peasant cottages along its course. He watched it make its way into the west, under the angled light of a rising piece of the moon. He finished his wine as it disappeared from sight, then turned and entered his apartments.

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The following afternoon, as he inspected the new northern mud pit, viewing the long line of dinosaur tracks leading through it, Prince Rango was approached by the Princess Rissa along what had been the scenic lakeside trail.

"Rango, what the devil's going on?" she asked.

"Another bit of overstressed reality seems to have given way—" he began.

She glanced at the wet, brown declivity and shook her head.

"That is not what I mean," she said, jerking a quick gesture in that direction, a glowing silver ring flashing upon her hand, "I refer to this morning's meeting, to which I was not invited."

Rango winced and drew back.

"It was fairly technical," he responded. "I didn't think it would hold any interest for you at all."

"And I wouldn't even have heard about it if Jancy hadn't been involved," she said. "She just came by to say that you're taking away Sombrisio and sending it back to the ghouls."

As if in response to her latest angry gesture, there came a deep, throat-clearing gurgle at the pit's center. They both turned in that direction as a large circle of muck was sucked downward. A moment later, there came a brief rumble from underground. Then a streaming plume of liquid shot upward out of the hole, thirty, forty feet into the air.

The smell that followed was sulfurous.

"That is a part of the reason," he said. "Or, rather, a part of the effect—the reason for the meeting, and the effect we were discussing."

"She told me that you'd ordered her to take the ring back to Anthurus and secrete it there as best she might where we had found it."

"That is correct."

"And you're sending Gar Quithnick off to look for lost Gelfait to return the amulet, Anachron?'

"That, too."

"…and Spotty north into the Penduggens, to dispose of Mothganger?"

"Right."

"And Domino Blaid is going to take the scroll of Gwykander to the cursed lake that serves as its library?"

He nodded.

"Yes, that summarizes it. They're all tough, competent people—and probably more than a little bored now that peace has broken out. They're ideal choices for putting the instruments to rest in safe places, against any future need."

"I wasn't questioning their competence, Rango," she said, as a yellow cloud smelling of rotten eggs by blew them. "I'm wondering about the whole idea of putting the instruments out of reach at this point. I don't see how you could bear to be parted with Mothganger, the sword that saved our lives so many times. I find the idea of giving up Sombrisio and the power she wields extremely painful. Sombrisio saved us, too."

"I feel the same way you do," he said. "However, the situation is suddenly altered. Though they were a priceless benefit in the past, they have now become a grave peril."

"Are you sure that's true?" she asked, as the ground shook again and the geyser shot even higher.

They were forced to retreat suddenly to the right as a shift in the wind threw a shower of hot droplets over them.

"Reasonably sure," he said, offering her his handkerchief. "I had to rely on expert opinions, and the consensus among the best sorcerers we could consult was that having all four of the magical instruments in one place was rather too much of a good thing. That is to say, their combined forces have been building, and all of the strange and dangerous events which have begun to occur here are a direct result. They are damaging the fabric of reality and things can only get worse. The sorcerers say that this is the real reason such potent devices are normally hidden in out-of-the-way places. Also, you'll not ordinarily find more than one stowed in the same spot. This is not just to make life difficult for people on quests. The things are so terribly potent that if you leave them in each other's vicinity for too long their combined forces place unnatural stresses on the area they occupy. We've got four of them here in Caltus, and the consensus is that their presence is the cause of all the magical disturbances we've been experiencing. And things will only get worse so long as they remain together."

"I don't know," she said, as the geyser belched at her back. "Supposing a few of Kalaran's nasties who survived the war were to show up, looking for trouble. For some of them, it would be very useful to have Mothganger or Sombrisio or Anachron handy. What I'm asking is, can we get a second opinion on this?"

Rango shook his head.

"I got the best I could find," he said, "and I told you there was a consensus. To delay longer while we hunted out a few more sages would be to court a real danger to no likely end. It's probable they'd all agree with their brothers and sisters in the Art. No, the sooner we ship the artifacts off to their resting places the sooner things will get back to normal here."

"You could probably keep one," she said. "Say, Mothganger or Sombrisio. There wouldn't be the same combination of powers then. None of them, off by itself, had worked the same sort of effects they're producing locally. Let's just send off two or three of the four and see if the situation stabilizes."

"This, too, was discussed," Rango said. "The reasoning is good and would probably work if we were just bringing a pair, say, of the instruments into a clear area. Unfortunately, some damage has already been done here. When the magical stresses have already occurred any object or operation of the Art may be likely to worsen things, or at least cause manifestations. So, yes, having one about would produce less stress than having all four. But it would still be taking a chance."

"In that case," she said, "couldn't you just move them out of town in four different directions until their effects are diminished to zero?"

Rango sighed and turned away, the fountain gurgling again at his back. One by one, a passing flock of birds began to fall, senseless, about them.

"Physically, what you are describing should work fine," he said at last. "However, there is the matter of security to be considered. If we stow them in too easily accessible places they may fall into the hands of enemies who could use them against us. This was doubtless the thinking of the ancients, as well, when they in their time secreted them. Their first consideration would have been to separate them to a great distance; their second, to make it risky for anyone who wanted to go after them. That's why there always have to be quests, and why they're always so damned difficult."

She moved nearer.

"It seems your experts did give it a lot of thought…" she said slowly.

"I think that each generation has to rediscover these basic truths," he responded. "Once they've been realized, though, it explains the similarities in so much of high heroic literature. Moralists and literary critics have always been quick to point out that having heroes and heroines climb mountains, trudge through deserts, swim raging torrents, and face ferocious beasts or supernatural menaces has been a symbolic, external analogue of an inner, spiritual experience, intended to show a kind of initiation trial and ritual cleansing, making them worthy of the great boon they are about to bear back to their people. Now we see that this is just another example of the patriotic balderdash cultures use to glorify their values at the expense of the individual—not to mention other cultures. The real reason is a purely physical matter: It's dangerous to leave magical tools too close together for too long."

She stared at him through the yellow vapors. Then, "I never heard you talk so—so philosophically—before," she said, "back when we were on the road, and in war camps."

He smiled bleakly.

"I've had a lot of time for reflection since the conflict ended," he said, "time to examine my recent affairs and determine where I made my most serious mistakes. Time to think about all sorts of matters I hadn't the opportunity to dwell upon before."

She moved nearer yet to him.

"Perhaps you've been spending too much time thinking," she told him, placing her hand upon his arm. "All thought and no action is just as unbalanced a state of affairs as its opposite, dear."

Suddenly, she was very near, pressed up against him. His jaw muscles bunched, then relaxed. He put his arms about her, held her to him.

"You're right, of course," he said. "It's just that I want to have everything taken care of, everything in place, for us. I want life to be going smoothly here when we finally settle down to the happiness forever after business."

"Of course," she said. "I understand your concern."

She looked up into his eyes.

"For a while I thought that I had done something to offend you, or that you had changed," she said. "It seemed almost as if you were avoiding me. But I begin to understand all that you've had on your mind."

He nodded.

"It hasn't been easy," he said. "It almost seems the peace has been harder than the war in some ways. I'm sorry if I neglected you while I tried to deal with some of its problems. I intend to have everything in hand in time for our nuptials and the crowning. Soon, I promise."

"I can wait," she said. "Just so I know nothing's gone wrong between us…"

"I'd have told you," he said, "if something had. No, it's the damned press of business that's been getting in the way."

Her lips parted slightly, so he leaned forward and kissed her. Moments later, another eruption occurred and more hot droplets fell upon them. He moved away, turned, and drew her after him.

"After life is safe from things like this, we can have more time for what we were doing," he said. "Unfortunately, it will probably keep me busy for a while yet."

"I appreciate that," she said, keeping up with his rapid pace. "But even in a less than perfect world perhaps we could find a few hours to be together in some place that is not yet disturbed."

"Wish we could," he called above the growing rumble of the new eruption. "But I've got to be off to another meeting on just this matter. We'll have to get together later."

◆ ◆ ◆

Rango sat in the back of the room, drinking a cup of tea. He was tired. The past several days in particular—this morning's meeting, the encounter with Rissa—had been emotionally stressful, and he was physically tired. So he'd turned the briefing of the Bearers over to one of their own number, with whom he'd conferred quickly in advance. Colonel Dominik Blaid—no, damn it! General Domino Blaid—for whom he'd just signed the promotion papers a week or so back—had the full respect of her fellows and the experience of countless military briefings.

As if observing some exotic bird, he studied her. Up until fairly late in the war, everyone had assumed cavalry commander Dominik Blaid—son of the old General Kerman Blaid—was the most brilliant tactician in the field. Nor were they incorrect, save as to the Colonel's gender. Old Kerman had badly wanted a son to carry on the family tradition, but his late wife had not cooperated, leaving him with a single child of the female persuasion. Undaunted, he had decided to make the best of the material at hand, cross-dressing his daughter, calling her by the masculine version of her given name, and beginning her cavalry training as soon as she could stay on a horse's back. And something in her genes responded from the first.

As with six or seven generations of Blaids before her, she had the knack. And something extra. Emerging victorious in engagement after engagement, she quickly rose in her command, exhibiting more and more flashes of the family aptitude at its highest level.

It was somewhere in the final weeks of the war that she had suffered a shoulder wound when enemy archers released clouds of arrows into her charge. Capturing the height she had stormed, she reeled then and slid from the saddle. Gar Quithnick, an unabashed admirer of the Colonel, was there immediately, tearing open the bloody shirt, ready to apply his *hingu* healing arts. When he realized that the man he most admired was a woman, Gar also realized that he had just fallen in love. But the lady did not share this sentiment. At least, not with him.

Rango smiled and sipped his tea as Domino began addressing the group. She still favored masculine garb, wore her hair short, and talked like a field commander. Hard to believe she'd fallen in love with a poet and scholar of ancient languages. But that is what the newly formed domestic intelligence service had told him. Jord Inder was the man's name.

Domino got along famously with Spotty Gulick, though there was nothing romantic there. As might be suspected with an infantry officer who had risen through the ranks and been involved in a number of the same campaigns, he had a lot in common with the Colonel. Besides, he seemed to favor petite blondes, and at five feet ten inches Domino was several inches taller than the husky captain.

On the other hand, Gar Quithnick was several inches taller than the lady. Slim, dark-haired, pale-eyed, he was graceful enough to be taken for a dancer rather than what he really was: one of the deadliest things on two feet. Trained from childhood in the killing arts of *hingu*, he had served in Kalaran's elite Guard until he learned of his master's part in his parents' deaths. Defecting then to Rango's standard, he had distinguished himself in the delaying action at Bardu Defile. The pass was narrow enough that only a pair of foot soldiers or a single mounted cavalryman could pass through at a time and led to the Plains of Paradath. There Rango's exhausted troops were encamped, not expecting an attack. One of six men volunteering to hold the Defile while word was carried to the encamped army below, Gar had waited, part of a sacrifice to gain five minutes—hopefully, ten.

The pass was held for the better part of an hour, the other five volunteers succumbing in less than half the time. The only reason Gar lived was that when he finally fell, so gashed, tattered, and covered with gore was he that no one cared to waste another swordstroke on an obvious dead man.

Still, hero though he was, Gar Quithnick had no real friends. There was a touch of fanaticism in that pale gaze for he dwelled in the shadow of *hingu*'s death-aesthetic. Spotty, who had fought indoctrinated warriors of other persuasions in the past, had expressed a hope that peace time might eventually turn Gar's mind to other affairs and so humanize him. Gar's feeling toward the others remained a mystery. He had never expressed himself, save in the case of Domino.

Rango finished his tea and listened for a time to Domino's presentation of the conference's conclusions concerning the magical instruments. There followed a series of questions, similar to those Rissa had asked him earlier. He poured himself more tea as Domino paced slapping her thigh and scratching her nose with her riding crop.

"And when are we to depart with the things?" Jancy Gaine asked.

Domino looked to Rango, who rose to his feet, nodded, and said, "Day after tomorrow. Everyone probably needs a day to settle current business and to get outfitted."

"Rissa was going to have some words with you about this."

"We've already had them."

He was about to reseat himself when he felt Gar Quithnick's gaze. He met it and raised his eyebrows.

"You've a question, Gar," he said.

"Yes," came that soft, level voice. "The only safe place for the amulet Anachron is its traditional home in a chapel in the mountain village of Gelfait. Unfortunately, the place only exists intermittently. It fades into and out of existence on no predictable schedule—years, sometimes decades or generations apart. I can cross the Waste of Rahoban and go to the place of the village, but I have no guarantee it will manifest when I get there."

Rango smiled.

"There is a secret tradition," he replied, "that the phenomenon will occur in response to the presence of the amulet. My consultants say there is every reason to believe this correct. Anachron and Gelfait seem to charge each other up in some fashion."

"I see," Gar said. "In that case, I will be ready to depart following this meeting if you will get me the amulet."

"Your party can prepare that quickly?"

"I was not accompanied in my travels when I fetched you the amulet," Gar replied. "I require no assistance in its return."

"I will address that matter after Domino's presentation," said Rango, seating himself and nodding to her to continue.

He glanced again at Jancy when he felt that she was glaring at him. Then she looked away. Just wanted to let him know her feelings, as if he wouldn't have known them in advance. A tough, husky blonde almost as tall as Domino and considerably heavier, she had been employed as a bouncer in the brothel to which the Princess had been taken after her purchase in the local slave market by the establishment's owner.

Jancy had recognized Rissa as the last surviving member of the Royal House of Regaudia, recently destroyed by Kalaran. She had rescued Rissa and gotten her safely out of town. Their wanderings, for the better part of a year, had taken her, Rissa, and their elf companion Calla Mallanik through a long series of adventures resulting, among other things, in the discovery of the ring Sombrisio in lost Anthurus, city of the dead, and finally leading to a meeting with Prince Rango.

He frowned slightly. Jancy was totally devoted to the princess. He did not doubt for a moment that she would lay her life down for her. She didn't get on well with men, however. Her feelings might have had to do with all she had seen and heard in the brothel. Or they might be something that ran deeper. She certainly didn't seem to trust him fully. He knew that she had referred to Gar Quithnick as "spooky." While she seemed to trust Spotty a little more than most men, if she had to talk with one of those present he knew that she would probably choose Domino, strictly because of gender.

He shrugged. Spotty and Domino were both aware of Jancy's quirks and were totally cordial to her. Even Gar had seemed kindly disposed toward the big woman, to the extent of having dined with her, though he later learned that the main thrust of Gar's conversation had involved an attempt to discover the death-aesthetic of the Northern totemic warriors—those fellows who wrapped themselves in animal skins and growled as they fought, occasionally gnawing the bodies of the slain in the aftermath of battle. In fact, now he reflected, it was after that dinner that she had begun referring to Gar as "spooky."

There was silence. Rango returned from his reverie as he realized that the last question had been answered, that Domino—raising her riding crop to her face and saluting him with it, with an outward-curved, downward gesture—was turning the meeting back over to him. He rose to his feet and nodded.

"Thank you, General Blaid," he said, moving forward. "Domino," he added then, "I just want to add a few things. First, Stiller, Mothganger is in the vault at the palace and will be turned over to you, on the morning of your departure. Jancy, you can work out the terms of surrender on Sombrisio with Rissa—"

"We already have," she interrupted, "thank you."

"Good," Rango stated, smiling broadly at her. "The other two instruments—the amulet Anachron and the scroll of Gwykander—are technically out of my reach. That is to say, they are in the custody of the Temple. They seized them that final day, laying claim to them as religious items. I will refrain from commenting on any possible political motivation here, but I'm certainly not looking for an argument between the Crown and the Church at this point. My experts are already seeking the Elders and the priests, to convince them of the danger involved in keeping the pieces. We hope to persuade them to turn the things loose the day after tomorrow. That, Gar, is why you will be unable to depart on your journey immediately after the meeting. I will let you and Domino—who will be Bearer of the Scroll—know immediately should we run into any problems with the negotiations. Any questions?"

He looked about the room. Finding no responses, he continued:

"I would like to introduce four gentlemen who will be accompanying you in your travels." He gestured toward a bench along the wall to his left at the room's rear where two bearded middle-aged men sat between a pair of beardless youths. One by one, they rose to their feet in order as he called their names. "Rolfus," he said of the first youth, "will accompany Stiller. Squill will go with Jancy. Piggon will join Domino's party. And Spido will keep company with Gar. All of these men are sorcerers—that is they have been trained in a single magical operation. They are communications specialists. They will keep me posted as to your progress and any problems. And they will advise me when your missions have been completed. It is essential that I have this information immediately rather than waiting upon your return, because I want all loose ends tied off before the coronation. I think it important that I come to power with all of the old business out of the way, and I want to be able to announce the settling of this matter as soon as possible."

Gar Quithnick raised his hand. When Rango nodded him he said, "As I explained earlier, I travel faster when I travel alone."

Rango smiled.

"I am sure that this is generally true," he said, "but as I explained, the information is essential for preparing the proper opening to my reign. As to Spido's delaying you, you may be mistaken. He elected to join us when the Armbruss training center, south of Kalaran's capital, was liberated. He has had several years of *hingu* training and he welcomes the opportunity of serving with you."

Spido bowed formally toward Gar, who responded with an elaborate hand gesture.

"You have satisfied my queries," he said to Rango.

"Are there any others?" Rango asked the group. When he saw that there were none, he concluded, "Then I thank you, and I wish you all good journeys."

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When the midlevel priest, Lemml Touday, visited the palace that evening with a message for Prince Rango's ears alone, Rango told his steward to bring him to his quarters directly.

When they were alone he studied the stocky, middle-aged man.

"Do you bring bad news? Or should I offer you a glass of my favorite wine and celebrate with you?"

"I'd prefer the latter," Lemml said.

Rango gestured toward a cushioned couch and smiled as he filled a pair of goblets, placed them upon a tray, and brought them over.

Rango smiled when the other toasted him, then asked, "A problem with the release of the amulet and the scroll, I presume?"

"No," the priest replied. "In fact, the talks are going quite as you might have wished. They've been adjourned till tomorrow, but your experts on magical instruments and stresses are very persuasive, according to our experts. Off the record, I think they've won over everyone who matters."

"Oh?" Rango lowered his drink and stared. "I don't understand. There is, perhaps, something you'd like to have for a report of the Temple's private deliberations on this? Do you wish to let me know who my friends and my enemies are?"

The priest smiled.

"No, that wasn't what I had in mind at all. I was thinking of something likely worth a lot more."

"And what might that be?"

"I am the Keeper of the Skull."

Rango shook his head in puzzlement.

"I don't understand what that signifies," he said.

"The principle of evil, the fallen Sunbird, Lord Kalaran," Lemml said. "I am custodian of his skull."

"Oh," Rango remarked. "I wasn't aware that it had received special treatment."

The priest nodded.

"Yes, it was exposed on the Temple's main spire for a month, after which it was flensed of all flesh and other softnesses in a boiling vat of appropriate herbs. Our greatest artisan then installed the two small figures—Demon and Messenger of Light—within it. It is kept in a jeweled casket in a secret place in the Temple, and I am its custodian. I check it every day to see whether the bright spirit has emerged from the right eye socket or the dark one from the left."

Rango nodded.

"And what has the result been?" he asked.

"The light figure has been prominent ever since the artifact was created…"

"That is good."

"…until this morning. When I checked today, I saw that the dark one had emerged."

"This is not good. If I understood you, this is to be interpreted as an ill omen, an indication of pending evil?"

"The skull was enchanted as such a warning system, yes."

"What have the Elders to say about this change, at this time?"

"Nothing. I haven't told them yet."

"Ah! I see…"

"Yes. While it might be interpreted as indicating that the departure of the amulet and the scroll from the Temple would be a bad thing, it might also simply mean that the odd nightly phenomena in the area have finally reached the point of representing a danger—what with giant lizards stalking through town and all. With this interpretation, it would be a good thing to take your experts' advice and get rid of the instruments. Which interpretation do you think more likely?"

Rango rubbed his neck slowly. Politics!

"You are the interpreter as well as the custodian?"

"Yes, though a sufficiently high church official might take issue with my reading."

"Yes?…"

"…and the phenomenon might be delayed in reporting till the day *after* the Bearers depart—and then the latter interpretation would be more likely, in that would be too late to do much about the former. You have a preference?"

"Yes, I do. Have you a favorite charity?"

"Such things tend to begin at home, do they not?"

"This has always been my observation," said Ran glancing at a pair of crossed swords which hung upon the wall to his right.

"…and if anything were to happen to me," Lemml went on, "my successor would note the prognosticatory state of affairs tomorrow, probably read it incorrectly, and certainly report it immediately."

Rango took a large swallow of his wine, as did the priest.

"It is good that you came to me," Rango said. "Your visit is a thing both educational and patriotic. Yes, I've mind to make a contribution. I assume you have the details with you?"

"Of course."

From beyond the balcony, through the opened window, they heard the frantic drumbeat commence, followed moments later by the shouted words none could understand. Shortly thereafter, the great thudding footfalls began. Then came a mournful saurian bellow which rattled their goblets on the tray.

In "Arts and Science: The Gar Quithnick Story" by Michael A. Stackpole, the assassin Gar Quithnick fails, the evil Udan Kann paralyzes him and seizes the amulet. Kann does not kill Quithnick because then the ring would vanish and return to Prince Rango, its previous owner. Whether Kann seized the ring for his own purpose or to give it to Kalaran is unclear as the tale ends.

Prelude the Second

Princess Rissa stood on the balcony outside of her room, staring mournfully at the geyser of mud and sulfur that had replaced the clear lake behind the castle, reflecting that sometimes reality was a bit more symbolic than was polite. Perhaps she should have gone with Jancy to return Sombrisio. They would be out in the wastes together, listening to the gripes of the mercenaries and trading dreams about what they would do after everything was right again. Calla Mallanik might tell some tale of elven valor designed to make humans feel subtly inferior and Sombrisio would—

She grimaced as the lake farted mud and filthy water. Sombrisio would love to pull something like that.

"Your Royal Highness!" twittered a voice from behind her. "The dressmaker is here to fit your wedding gown!"

Rissa came indoors with a final wistful look toward the distant Desolation and stepped into her bedchamber.

In the parlor, Daisy, her maid since her return from slavery and adventure, conversed with the seamstress, a slim, angular woman with a pronounced squint. Silvery-haired Daisy was buxom and plump. Together, they reminded the Princess of a needle and pincushion.

As she stripped down to her shift, the Princess eavesdropped on their conversation.

"You don't say!" Daisy said. "Giant snakes! Winged! Flying!"

"I do say," the seamstress said. "They've been harrying the cattle market two hours since. The Prince's archers brought one down. It had lovely scales once you could stop worrying about it swallowing you with so much as a by-your-leave."

The Princess stepped into the room and the servants curtsied deeply. Rissa accepted their homage graciously. Part of being a princess, Mama had always said, was being poised even in your underwear.

The seamstress began unwrapping the parcels her assistant carried. There were yards and yards of ivory silk, lengths of hand-tatted lace, and a rattling box of pearls. When the seamstress and Daisy shook the fabric out, Rissa could see that it had begun to take on the form of an elegant, long-trained wedding gown. Her earlier bleak mood gave way to excitement.

When the fitting was finished and the seamstress sent on her way, Rissa put on riding clothes, picked up the elven bow and arrows that Calla had made her, and went looking for Rango. The guards said that the Prince was alone in his privy council chambers and she bustled down, still full of her excitement about the wedding.

"Rango, darling," she said, sweeping in with a *pro forma* rap on the door, "come hunting with me!"

The Prince looked up from a heap of papers, the flicker of annoyance on his handsome features changing into something warmer, but not precisely welcoming. He rose and kissed her hand.

"Rissa, dearest," he said. "Hunting? Now, with our coronation and wedding to plan and our country in peril?"

"That peril was what I thought to hunt," she said, somewhat tartly. "Report is that winged serpents are harrying the cattle merchants. I thought that we could go and bag ourselves one. The skin would make us fine boots and belts."

"Boots and belts are far from my concern now," he said, relinquishing his grasp on her hand.

"Then what about the morale of our citizens?" she asked. "They await a warrior prince to ascend the throne, but you seem transformed into a clerk!"

"Perhaps a clerk is what peacetime needs, precious," he said. "If they need martial succor, I shall send one of the Guard units down. They will deal with the serpents."

Rissa pouted, hating herself for it, but unable to stop. Rango spoke rightly. Her own parents had reigned more with law book and example than with martial valor, but she had not expected Rango to settle down so quickly. When she and Jancy had met him after their departure from Anthurus…

She might have said more, but there was a rap on the chamber door.

"My next meeting, Rissa," the Prince said, his expression neutral. "I will send a division of the Guard out after the winged serpents."

Rissa knew a dismissal when she heard one. She left her, barely sparing a glance for the wiry man in priest's robes who was waiting to enter.

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Lemml Touday looked after the Princess as she departed.

"The Princess seems less than happy," he observed to Rango.

"The Princess will be more settled after the wedding and coronation," the Prince replied. "Right now she is still adjusting to her new duties after a trouble-free life of adventure."

"I heard that the Princess was taken as slave, sold into a brothel, and escaped only by daring a journey across the ghoul-haunted Desolation to the very gates of Anthurus, City of the Dead," Lemml commented.

"Precisely," the Prince said. "Days without responsibility except to oneself. Days of immediate gratification and glory. Days without ritual, pomp or protocol. She will settle down when the weight of her new position comes home to her."

"As it has to you, Your Highness?"

"Indeed. You have a report for me?" The Prince smiled suddenly. "Forgive me, Lemml. I have not yet offered you hospitality. My little interview with Rissa unsettled me. Take a seat by the fire and let me fetch some wine."

When the Prince uncorked the wine, the liquid frothed in a fashion quite unlike champagne or beer and spilled thick and brown into the goblets. Brow wrinkled, the Prince sniffed the liqueur.

"It is not beer. In fact, it smells curiously sweet."

Carefully, he sipped, then took a larger swallow.

"Not bad at all. Lemml, I believe that the magical anomalies have spread to my wine cellar. Will you drink? This is certainly a rare beverage."

"Whatever you drink, my Prince, is fine with me," the priest replied, tasting the odd brew.

"Shall we get to business?" Prince Rango prompted gently.

"As you wish, sire. I come to report that the Demon of Darkness continues to emerge from the skull of Kalaran. I have interpreted the portent as soothingly as I can, but the High Priest is becoming concerned that we should not have permitted the scroll and the amulet to be taken from Caltus."

The Prince smiled and sipped his dark, sticky brew.

"What do they expect me to do?" he asked. "They acceded to my councilors' requests and now the artifacts are gone to their resting places."

"Some recall that you had communication sorcellets sent with each of the heroes," Lemml Touday replied, feigning unhappiness at his news. "There is talk of having you recall General Blaid and Gar Quithnick before they can complete their quests."

"Damn the impertinence!" the Prince snarled. "Do they not see that larger things are at stake than a few portents from an enchanted skull? I would not put it past the wickedness of Kalaran to permeate his skull so that it would give us misleading portents!"

Lemml smiled, "Why, that's rather nice, Your Highness. I could do something with that, if protest becomes too strong. Of course, I would need to plant my hints very carefully…"

The Prince opened a drawer and pulled out a small, jingling pouch. He handed it to the priest.

"I have been collecting for your favorite charity," he said, "and have come up with some extra donations. I do not think I can raise extra funds easily again before the coronation. Of course, after the coronation, I will have access to all the treasury. However, if the amulet and scroll are returned, the coronation may be greatly delayed."

Lemml swallowed the rest of his drink, rose from his chair, and bowed deeply. The pouch vanished into the sleeve of his robe.

"I understand, Your Highness. I will do my best for you."

"Do," the Prince said, watching him depart, "do."

"A Very Offensive Weapon" by David Drake tells about the quest to hide the ring Sombrisio. The ring is "offensive" because it insults and curses anyone near it. Sombrisio commands Jancy to cast the ring under a moving mountain, "Throw me now, you brainless cunt!" This solution may not be permanent; the mountain will eventually move on, possibly leaving the ring on the sand for the wandering Mohammed to pick up. Jancy misses the Princess; there are hints of her lesbianism and of what happened during their imprisonment in a brothel before Forever After.

Prelude the Third

"*How* tall are your bridesmaids, m'lady?" the seamstress said in disbelief.

Rissa gestured. "Well, I am quite tall and both are taller than me. I think I have set of Jancy's togs around here somewhere, and Domino—well, she was Dominik Blaid, so you should have no trouble seeing her tailor. She's lived here forever, at least when she wasn't in the field."

The pinched lines about the seamstress's eyes grew deeper. They had given the wedding dress a second fitting and it was stunning. Not much was left but the routine stitching on of yards of lace, hundreds of pearls, and hemming the lot—including the thirty-foot train.

Now, with Daisy's able assistance, they were designing the costumes for the wedding party. It would not be a large group, as royal weddings went. All of Rissa's family had been slaughtered by Kalaran—as had all of Rango's. This had settled the difficult problem of coordinating dresses to be worn by the mothers of the bride and groom, but still left plenty of others.

"Dominik Blaid," the seamstress repeated faintly. "Very good, Your Highness. I believe I had heard something of the sort. If I recall correctly, she is dark and Jancy Gaine is fair?"

"That's right," Rissa said. "Is that a difficulty?"

"It does limit our selection of colors. Pink, for example, suits blondes quite well, but it rarely flatters brunettes."

"I don't think that Jancy would wear pink," Rissa said, flinching a bit at the thought. "What about a pale blue?"

"I considered that, but both of the ladies in question are somewhat tan." The seamstress frowned. "Pale blue might make them look sallow. How about lavender? It is quite regal and would be quite nice given that your coronation is to follow the wedding ceremony."

Rissa nodded, reflecting as they began to inspect swatches of lavender fabric that it would be nice once the new Royal House was established and had selected its royal colors. Decisions like this would become a matter of the past. No one ever worried about how suitable royal colors were to anyone's complexion.

Sketching out rough designs for the gowns drove the poor seamstress to distraction. Clothing that would suit full-figured, muscular Jancy would swallow the slimmer, more hard-bodied Domino. Dresses that flattered Domino's boyish figure would make Jancy look hulking. When she left with initial design notes in hand, the seamstress was muttering prayers to any deity who would listen.

Rissa sent Daisy to see the woman home, promising she could look after herself for a half hour. Although she meant the guildwoman a kindness, she also craved a brief moment of privacy. Daisy tended to mother her, something that Rissa would not have minded from her own nurse. However, that poor lady had been slain when Kalaran's forces looted her family castle. She had not been young or pretty enough for the slave markets. Indirectly, Nurse had saved Rissa's life, for she had insisted on dressing the Princess in servant's clothing. Thus, none of the troops had realized that the Princess had lived, instead of being slaughtered with the rest of her family.

To distract herself from these dark memories, Rissa strolled to the window and counted through the rest of the wedding party. Spotty—Stiller—Gulick was to be best man. She made a mental note to see that his outfit did not clash with red, as he was certain to be flushed and his face might blotch.

Gar Quithnick was to be the second groomsman. She shuddered a bit at the idea of an assassin at her back, chiding herself for her lack of faith. However, he could not be denied his place.

Ibble, Spotty's dwarven friend, was to be ring bearer, a role given by tradition to one of the shorter races.

That filled out the main party. Various dignitaries, religious authorities, and loyal companions would make up the guest list. The galleries of the Cathedral of Dym would be left open for the public.

Rango had insisted that tickets be sold at a token price so that there would not be mobbing. She understood his reasoning, but thought it somewhat déclassé. There was no arguing with his point that the war against Kalaran had drained the Treasury.

She sighed. He hardly seemed the same man as the dashing warrior to whom she had lost her heart. Still, he seemed a stable, responsible ruler. No doubt the people would love him. She wondered, would she?

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Lemml Touday saw the silhouette of the Princess against the window curtain as he arrived at the palace for his meeting with Prince Rango. He hoped she had not put the Prince into a bad mood today. What he had to tell the Prince would not sit well even if His Highness was in the best of moods.

Prince Rango was again in his privy council chamber. Today he was moving pins around on a wall map, consulting a handful of note cards as he did so. In his simple trousers and close-fitting tunic, he looked more like a military commander than he had on other of Lemml's visits and the priest found that this made him uneasy.

"Greetings, Lemml," the Prince said. "Have a seat. I will be with you as soon as I have finished marking these position reports on the map. I've heard from my questing heroes and things seem to be going quite well."

"You seem to be marking more than four units there, Your Highness," the priest commented.

"That's right," Prince Rango said, "I've been repositioning various units around the Faltane. There are still pockets of fighting—bandit activity and such. It wouldn't do to win the Faltane from Kalaran only to lose it to Civil unrest."

"Not at all, sire," Lemml said.

Prince Rango finished with his map and bore a silver salver over the table. With a slight flourish, he uncovered a pair of fluted blue-green bottles marked with white script lettering in an unfamiliar language. They were filled with a brown liquid that Lemml suspected was identical to the beverage he had imbibed on his previous visit. The Prince removed metal caps from the bottles with a curious device and poured the foaming beverage into two iced goblets.

"Over half of the royal wine cellar has gone over to this stuff," the Prince said cheerfully. "Fortunately, I like it. Now, what is the news from the Temple?"

Lemml sipped his drink. He found that the sweet, syrupy stuff made his teeth squeak slightly. Still, it was refreshing.

"The Demon of Darkness continues to hold forth within the skull of Kalaran. The Messenger of Light retreated so far into the right socket that it is difficult to see. Given that the more rampant manifestations of the space-time rift are beginning to disperse—Your Highness's advisors seem to have been correct on that point—I am having more difficulty reassuring the religious authorities that nothing is wrong."

Prince Rango's smile was cold. "I have paid you well to assuage their fears. Do so."

"I will," Lemml promised hastily.

He leaned forward in his chair, dropping his voice so that the Prince had to lean to hear what he said next.

"But, my lord, what if the skull is right? What if something of Darkness *is* threatening the good of the Faltane? Shouldn't we do something?"

The Prince guffawed. "I place no faith in magical trinkets. How could the skull of an evil wizard provide us with any reliable knowledge? I swear, Lemml, you've become as superstitious as your masters! I had thought you a solid businessman."

Lemml flushed, "I am, Prince Rango. However, magic is a potent force. One who toys with it toys with dangerous matters."

The Prince slapped his sheathed sword. "Leave such concerns to me, Lemml. This sword has beaten great enemies. Keep peace within the Temple and within a handful of days all will be settled. I will be coronated and nothing will stir me or those who have served me well."

"Yes, Your Highness." Lemml smiled weakly. "I shall return to report within a few days' time."

"Very good." The Prince's chuckle was robust, but his eyes were cold. "And make certain that I like that report, Lemml."

"I will, sire. I will."

Lemml hurried from the Prince's council chamber. His belly was roiling from a combination of the sweet brew and worry. He was safely in his rooms when he recalled that the sword with which the Prince had beaten his great enemies was no longer in the capital. Mothganger, along with the other artifacts, was on its way into hiding.

> *"Wanted: Guardian" by Robert Lynn Asprin relates how Stiller takes the sword Mothganger, intending to hide it in a dragon's lair, but the wily dragon and an elf convince him to leave it with them. They will encase it in stone and have a copy of it buried to the hilt in stone as a decoy (presumably to be extracted by young Arthur, King-to-be). At the story's end Stiller loses everything in a poker match with the dragon, and the elf begins black market sales of Mothganger counterfeits to warriors.*

Prelude the Fourth

"We can finish the fittings when the ladies in question return from…" The seamstress paused. "Where did you say they were?"

"Jancy has gone into the Desolation of Thaumidor and Domino is in the farther reaches of the Lake District," Princess Rissa answered, twirling so she could see herself in her wedding gown.

Pearls glistened on the bodice, lace trimmed the plunging neckline and the floor-sweeping hem. The detachable train was trimmed with even more lace and embroidered with the crest of Regaudia, the Royal House of which she was the last survivor.

"How is work coming on the veil?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, Your Highness," the seamstress replied with a soothing smile. "Once the Prince supplied the measure of the crown with which it will need to fit, work went along swimmingly."

"Have you seen the crown?" Rissa asked curiously.

"No." A blush actually lit the seamstress's thin face. "The Prince explained that it was to be a surprise for you and that no one but the smiths and jewelers working on it were to see it before the wedding day. He said it is his gift to you."

"Have you thought about what you will give him, ducky?" Daisy asked. "And about gifts for the members of the wedding party?"

Princess Rissa frowned. "I have, but I am rather stumped. They are all so different. Finding one gift that would suit each of them would be difficult—that is, if we omit weaponry, which doesn't seem appropriate."

"No, ducky, it doesn't," Daisy said severely.

"Something with the new royal emblem would be nice," the seamstress suggested, "perhaps a crystal dish or a picture frame."

Rissa shook her head. "The emblem is a good idea but we haven't finished designing it. In any case, I can't see what Domino or Jancy or Stiller or Gar would do with a crystal dish."

Fleetingly, she envisioned Domino watering her horse from the hypothetical piece of cut crystal or Gar using it to design some novel but poetic fashion of slaying an enemy.

"Clothing is certainly out," the seamstress said hesitantly. "How about a rare wine?"

"Most of the royal cellar has been transformed into this brown fizzy goo that only Rango can stand," Rissa said, sparing a wan smile at the memory of her fiancé. "We are importing wine by the barrel for the wedding feast, but I don't count on it staying wine."

"Do the members of your wedding party have any hobbies?" the seamstress asked.

"Domino used to raise horses, but I'm not certain if she still does. Spotty—I mean Stiller—gambles." She frowned. "I never did learn if Jancy had any hobbies. She's a warrior by training and most of what we did was fight."

"And this Gar?" the seamstress said hesitantly. "Does he have any hobbies?"

Princess Rissa nodded. "He kills people. Elegantly."

"Perhaps weapons would be best." Daisy sighed. "Something like a ceremonial dagger with a place for the royal crest to be mounted once you have one."

"I'll speak to Rango," Rissa said, although that was the last thing she really wanted to do. "Certainly he will know a smith who can do the work quickly."

"You should change first, ducky," Daisy admonished. "He shouldn't see the gown until the wedding day!"

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In his council chamber, the impending bridegroom was in conference with Lemml Touday. He frowned as the priest finished his report.

"And so, Your Highness, I have diverted discussion from the skull repeatedly. Now that the Temple is in festive upheaval with plans for the wedding and coronation the question should be moot until afterwards."

"Afterwards?" The Prince raised his elegant eyebrows. "Afterwards everything will be happy. The artifacts will be returned, the magical phenomena will cease, and we will settle down to an era of peace and justice."

Lemml frowned. "I sincerely hope so, Your Highness. However, I have been researching the history of prognosticatory devices like the skull and they are rarely wrong. Their portents have been misunderstood and their warnings ignored, but if they consistently warn of impending Evil, then that Evil is impending."

"I see," the Prince said, sipping his brown, frothy drink with urbane relish, "and you think that I am being overly casual in regard to these portents."

Lemml took a deep breath. "In a word, sire, yes."

He reached into the sleeve of his robe and removed the small pouch he had received from the Prince on his last visit. It jingled, slightly fuller even than before.

"I have meditated at length," he said, "and have decided to return some of your donations to my favorite charity. I will not speak of anything that has passed between us, but I am a priest and I find that I cannot forget my duty."

The Prince studied Lemml, then his gaze came to rest on the map on the wall. He rose, studied the position of some of his pins, and then returned to his seat.

"Lemml, on that map I have been tracing the progress of several things. The blue pins mark the last known positions of my questing heroes."

Lemml turned so that he could look. Behind him, he heard the Prince take the cap off one of the bottles and refresh their drinks.

"The red pins mark bandit incursions and monster sightings," the Prince continued, "the green pins mark natural disasters—floods, earthquakes, tornados. The yellow pins mark unnatural disasters."

"There seem to be a good number of those in Caltus," the priest commented, accepting the freshened goblet from the Prince's hand.

"There do, but there are fewer than there were before," the Prince said. "Several of my heroes are on their return journeys and the number of disastrous occurrences—natural and unnatural—has been falling steadily. To be brief, I have been looking for any evidence of the Evil that you and the skull have been fussing about and have seen no trace."

Lemml sipped his drink. It seemed a trace bitter this time—perhaps the magical sweet stuff had begun to spoil. He rather hoped so. He didn't share the Prince's fondness for the drink and longed for a cool goblet of wine or a mug of beer.

"I am relieved that you are being so careful, sire," he said, "but my position stands. I can no longer serve as your eyes and ears within the Temple. Also I must warn you that I will be alert to foil those who might be tempted to do so now that I am not."

Rango shook his head sadly. "You misjudge me, priest. Do you not recall that you came with this offer to me, not me to you? You think that because you were corrupt that others will be or that I would seek to ask other priests to serve both Crown and Temple? No, when you came to me, I took it as an omen that the Deities of Light wished for me to have eyes and ears within their buildings. Now that you depart my service, I will end that phase of my rulership."

"I hope so." Lemml rose unsteadily, the strain of the conversation having frayed his nerves. "Then I bid you good day, my lord, and offer my blessings on your impending nuptials."

"Good-bye, Lemml Touday," the Prince said with a curious smile. "I shall not see you again."

Dismissed, the priest made his way down stone corridors that suddenly seemed infinite. His head spun. One stone wall looked much like another. He passed the same tapestry three times without coming to the side door which he had used to come to his meetings with the Prince.

Calling out was out of the question. He did not know what type of reception he would get from the Prince's Guard, some of whom were tough soldiers, hardened by service in the wars against the Fallen Sunbird. Staggering on, he froze as he heard light footsteps tripping down a stone stairway. Then the Princess Rissa came into view.

"Oh, my!" she cried, kneeling beside him. "What has happened to you?"

He tried to reply and vomited on her shoes.

When next he knew himself, he was lying on a pallet in a cool, shadowy room. The Princess knelt beside him, putting aside a basin of cool water and a rag.

"Am I in the dungeon?" he whispered.

"It depends on how you see it," the Princess said. "This is the room reserved for my lady companion. Daisy prefers to go home to her husband, so it is empty. After what I've been through, no one is terribly worried about guarding my virtue."

"Ah," he moaned.

"Now, what happened to you?" Rissa asked. "As best as I can tell, you were poisoned. I administered purgatives then fed you activated charcoal to absorb the residue."

Lemml Touday gaped. "I was in conference with Prince Rango. I…"

He stopped. This lovely woman was the Prince's fiancée. She had just saved his life and hidden him away, but could he trust her? She studied him and he remembered the steel within that lovely breast.

"Princess, I have been the Prince's spy within the Temple…"

He told her the whole story, not even omitting the monies he had received or those he had kept. He told her his suspicions that Evil was looming and that somehow the Prince had an interest in hiding the rise of that Evil. Princess Rissa listened, a frown furrowing her brow.

"I, too, have worried about the Prince," she confided when Lemml finished his tale. "He has not been acting like himself. He takes pleasure in bookkeeping, accounting, and meetings. When he rides or does sword practice he does it as one would a duty, not a pleasure. I do not know what ails him, but I dread this wedding as no bride should dread her wedding and dread this coronation as no Queen-to-be ever has."

Lemml sipped the cool, clear water she poured for him from an earthenware pitcher. His mouth still tasted like the sour remnants of a dog's dinner, but his head was clearing.

"What should we do, my lady?" he asked.

"You said that the Prince said that some of the heroes are already returning?"

"Yes, he did not specify which, but he seemed pleased."

Rissa nodded "The day for the wedding and coronation will be set soon. You shall become my eyes and ears in the city. There is no way you can return to the Temple, for the Prince clearly meant to have you dead."

Lemml nodded. "I fear leaving the skull untended. What if the Prince sends someone to steal it or damage it? It is a powerful magical device and the last remnant of the Fallen Sunbird."

"A good point," Rissa said. "As soon as darkness falls, you must steal over to the Temple and bring it here. I will rinse the worst of the filth from your robes."

"What if the Prince sees me leaving?" Lemml asked. "He must wonder that my body has not been found."

"A good point," Rissa agreed. "I shall give him a plausible story to cover for the absence of your body—the palace has been fraught with magical phenomena lately—and you shall leave the palace dressed in a gown belonging to a member of Rango's late family. You can change into your own robes when you are safely away."

Lemml began to protest at this slight to his dignity, but his words died unspoken. The Princess was right and her expression brooked no argument. This was a lady who knew her own mind, not a palace-bred royal pet.

For a moment, he almost pitied the Prince, but only for a moment.

> *"Domino's Tale" by Jane Lindskold tells of the transvestite General Domino Blaid's efforts to dispose of the scroll Gwykander. She loses it and then regains it after battling Necrotica. She realizes that Kalaran may not be dead after all and that he may have possessed Prince Rango. She decides to return with the scroll, intending to cast an incantation over Kalaran with it. The tale ends with Domino planning to meet with her fellow questers (all members of the upcoming bridal party), ostensibly to plan the bridal and stag parties.*

Postlude

The day of the wedding and coronation dawned bright green and gold. The gold came from the risen sun, the green from the trio of comets that arched in slow, spectacular passage across the blue sky. In the palace chambers, surrounded by twittering maids who were dressing her for the festivities, General Domino Blaid reflected that thus far nothing had gone quite according to plan.

On her return to Caltus, she had settled her troops, reported to Prince Rango, and checked the Onyx Eagle to see who else was back. Jancy had left word—and in any case they saw each other at the interminable fittings for the bridesmaids' dresses.

Spotty was late. When he did arrive in the capital, he admitted that he'd gotten caught up in a poker game with the dragon Schmirnov from which he had been dragged bodily by his dwarven companion, Ibble. Gar Quithnick had not shown up at all and, from what Domino had been able to pry from Prince Rango, neither he nor Spido had been heard from for some time.

The only good thing was that Princess Rissa had been receptive to their suspicions. Jancy had sounded her out with the blunt delicacy of her fine-honed ax and the Princess had confessed that she had developed her own suspicions during the weeks they had been apart.

Domino obediently sat so that a woman could try to do something artistic with her short-cropped hair. From the adjoining room, she could hear Jancy thoroughly cursing someone who was removing curlers from her blond locks. The phrasing was particularly good—Sombrisio's influence no doubt.

Wishing that she had the resources of both Sombrisio and Mothganger, Domino let her thoughts drift to Jord. He and Spotty should be carrying out the first stages of their plan just about now. They had the help of the renegade priest, Lemml Touday, so she was little worried. How much trouble could subduing one elderly Chief Priest be?

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Waiting outside the sacristy of the Cathedral of Dym, Stiller Gulick and Jord Inder listened for Lemml Touday to give them the all clear.

"The blessings of all the Gods, Goddesses, and Demi-deities of Light be upon you, your Reverend Grace," they heard him greet the Chief Priest.

Fenelais, the new Chief Priest, was known for his idiosyncrasies—one of which was his desire to garb himself in privacy and have some moments of meditation before any religious service at which he was officiating. Despite knowing of his eccentricities, the comrades in arms were startled by his response.

"A good day, perhaps for me, foolish intruder," growled a controlled voice, "but for you it means your death!"

They burst into the sacristy to find an elderly man with a freshly shaven head standing over Lemml's crumpled body. Blood leaked from the priest's nostrils. The elderly man was partially garbed in the ceremonial robes of the Chief Priest and a sand-cast gold sunburst with a starburst of diamonds at its heart rested upon his breast.

"Udan Kann!" Stifler swore, his complexion immediately blossoming with pale blotches.

"You know me, ill-favored one," Udan Kann hissed. "No matter, this knowledge will only hasten your demise."

Stiller unsheathed his sword and dove at the *hingu* master. Udan Kann twisted his torso with the suppleness of a high-priced prostitute and avoided the blow. Then he tapped Stiller lightly on the arm and sent the warrior reeling.

Jord was about to charge into the fray when the grating voice of Calla Mallanik sounded in his ears.

"Move, poet," the elf said. "Domino would never forgive us if we got you slaughtered."

The elf raised his silver-strung bow and let fly with the arrows of fiery elf-wrought gold that never failed to find the life of evildoers at whom they were shot. Two arrows raced toward their target—overkill by a hundred percent—yet Udan Kann plucked both arrows from the air.

He tossed them like darts back at the astonished elf. One sliced the silver bowstring into glittering twine, the second pinned the elf's floppy-toed boot to the floor.

"I will tend to you in a moment." He laughed.

"Not if I have my say!" Stiller Gulick cried, charging back, his sword angled to give the assassin a new spinal column.

Udan Kann didn't even turn as he twisted to poke Spotty in the eyes.

"Snake eyes!" He giggled. "Or don't you play dice?"

"That piece of jewelry you're wearing," Jord Inder said, "it's Anachron, the amulet that Gar Quithnick was supposed to return to Gelfait!"

Udan Kann lurched as if struck, then he grasped the amulet in one hand, sparing the other to pluck a flight of arrows from Calla's newly strung bow from before his breast.

"Yes, it is Anachron. The Pariah has failed you as he failed me. In both cases, his obsession with the perfection of his art made him less than the demands of his task!"

"Damn Gar Quithnick!" Spotty Gulick cursed, struggling to his feet.

"I never trusted Gar Quithnick," Calla agreed, reaching for another arrow.

Udan Kann lurched twice more, his supple hands paving at his chest. His humorless eyes bulged from head. Falling to his knees, he moaned.

"Gar, my son, I did you ill to call you Pariah," he gasped, his voice coming thinner. "What a beautiful use of the delayed death touch! Truly, I should have named you *hingu-Grashanshao!*"

With a final moan of chest-crushing pain, Udan Kann crumpled to the ground, embracing at last the death that had been his best student's final exam.

"Well, I guess Gar did come through for us after all," Stiller Gulick said, looking at the dead assassin with respect, the blotches on his countenance fading slightly. "Is the priest still alive?"

Jord checked the body, "Yes, thank the Gods of Light. I guess that Udan Kann planned to play with him first."

"I wonder why Gar let him get away with the amulet?" Calla mused as he wiped the blood from the priest's face and began to administer first aid. "Clearly, he could have slain him."

Jord knelt by Udan Kann and began to remove the ceremonial robes. "I think that he had grown suspicious and let Udan Kann return as a warning to us."

"He could have come himself," Stiller commented. "It would have been a hell of a lot safer."

"True," Jord agreed, "but I don't think he knew that Kalaran had possessed Prince Rango, only that the Fallen Sunbird was somehow still active. Gar did not dare risk that Udan Kann's failure to return would warn his master."

"I guess it makes sense—for a *hingu* master," Stiller said. "I hope that Gar's alive, wherever he is."

"I wonder," Jord replied. "Legend says that Anachron will return to its previous bearer when the first is slain. It rests yet upon Udan Kann's chest."

"I guess that means Gar is dead, then, though I would have given odds on him," Stiller said sadly. "He was a creep, but he was our creep."

Calla Mallanik cleared some litter from a bench and lifted Lemml up, then he started back in surprise.

"Spring's bouncing balls!" he exclaimed, "I've found the Chief Priest and he's breathing!"

"I guess that Kalaran didn't want any more problems the religious establishment than he could help," Stiller said. "Now let me tend him. I've a dangerous job for you."

"Do you want me to climb into the eaves and serve as a sniper?" the elf asked.

"No."

"Go and see if any other *hingu* assassins are lurking in the bushes?"

"No."

"Carry a secret message to the Princess?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"I want you to put on Gar's outfit and get ready to take his place in the wedding party."

"How is that dangerous?"

"Have you thought about how Gar would feel if he hurried back here all the way from Gelfait and finds that you've taken his place?"

"Oh." Somberly Calla began to put on the groomsman's uniform. "Wait, I thought you said he was dead, so why are you worried?'

"I also said that I'd give odds on him," Stiller said. "Hurry, they're starting to play the music."

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Trumpets blared the opening of the triumphal march of the Royal House of Regaudia as Princess Rissa's carriage drew up in front of the Cathedral of Dym. Daisy, elegantly garbed and inordinately proud in her new role as Dame of Protocol, ordered the footmen to open the carriage doors.

"I've been going into battle since I was a child," Domino mused, "and I never was afraid. Why am I scared now?"

"Maybe because you don't have a horse between your legs." Jancy chuckled, then she softened. "Sif, I went into my first battle before I was born—my mother was a warrior woman like me—and I'm nervous, too. How are you doing, Rissa?"

The Princess looked up from the enormous bouquet of white roses, baby's breath, apple blossoms, and tulips in her lap.

"I'm nervous. Who wouldn't be, knowing what we know, suspecting what we suspect? I only wish we didn't have to do this so publicly."

"You know why we must," Domino reminded her. "Kalaran would not sit through the exorcism. Our only hope is that he will fail to notice that Jord is reading not the wedding text but the exorcism from the scroll of Gwykander. Jord has been memorizing as much as he can, so that he will not need to make obvious what he is doing, but…"

"There are lots of buts," Jancy interrupted. "We can do no more planning. Now is the time for battle and praying for the blessings of both your Gods of Light and those of my battle-loving Northern Gods."

"Amen," Rissa breathed. "Amen."

They processed into the Cathedral of Dym amid a cheering throng of the citizenry who pressed against the uniformed guards to bombard the bride and attendants with flowers, birdseed, sugared almonds, small coins, and light wheaten cakes.

"Fertility charms," Jancy explained to the puzzled Princess.

"Damn," Domino swore.

When they entered the Cathedral, Prince Rango, Stiller Gulick, and Calla Mallanik strode from the sacristy. Stiller bore a broad tray with the newly minted crowns of the Faltane. Calla bore a slightly smaller tray holding four beautiful daggers. The Chief Priest followed them more slowly, bearing in his arms the heavy, leatherbound Book of the Service.

"Is that Jord?" Jancy whispered.

"I don't know," Domino answered.

"Hush," Princess Rissa said.

The first one to process down the aisle was Seth. The little girl was crowned with a diadem of pink rosebuds and bore a basket with dried rose petals that she scattered along the aisle.

"Walk slowly, slowly, ducky," Daisy coached her. "Now you, Captain Ibble."

The dwarf wore a set of knee britches and matching vest with a white shirt. His feet were in open-toed sandals and he puffed a large pipe of the finest tobacco. He carried the wedding rings carefully balanced on a satin pillow.

"Behold the bearer of the rings!" Daisy said reverently. "Isn't he just precious?"

Ibble shot her a dirty look before heading down the aisle, a measured distance behind Seth.

"Now you, General Blaid," Daisy said, "and Jancy just a few paces behind."

The march swelled to a triumphal crescendo as the bride finally advanced down the aisle. From above, the ticket holders sprinkled the wedding party with more flower petals. From the aisle seats the guests smiled and waved, bursting with the peculiar somber pride that only comes when one is part of a wedding of someone very special indeed.

Spite, in its guise as a green elf maid, stood beside Rafe and his wife in the pew reserved for comrades, along with Piggon and Rolfus, the surviving sorcellets. A few other members of Domino's Company filled out the row. The quests had been singularly hard on the other companions.

When Rissa had reached the sanctuary and stepped to stand beside Rango, the congregation turned as one to face the front. The orchestra finished the last few bars of the march and fell silent.

"Dear people of the Faltane," came a rusty voice from beneath the Chief Priest's veiled shawl, "we come here to join two people in holy matrimony and to celebrate the coronation of our new King and Queen."

The congregation burst into enthusiastic applause. Jancy glanced at Domino as if to say "Is that Jord?" Domino shrugged.

She tried to catch Stiller's eye, figuring that he would give her some signal, and found that he was studying the Prince's Guard with a faintly quizzical expression marring his poker face. He had the advantage of her in that he could see the ones lining the side aisles and the back of the Cathedral. Domino, at least, could see the ones in the sanctuary without craning around in an undignified fashion.

Initially, nothing seemed out of order. The armed men stood ranked, wearing a variation of the same black-and-green uniform that was her habitual attire. Some looked bored—which was understandable as the Chief Priest had now begun intoning the ritual in Ancient Thermaean. Some stood square shouldered and alert, proud to be the honor guard for their Prince's most important day. Still others rested their hands on their sword hilts, ready for action.

Domino paused, her gaze scanning the faces of the men, rather than their uniforms and stance. She realized that she did not recognize a one. True, she had been a cavalry commander, not an infantry commander, but engagements had overlapped. Surely she would recognize at least one face among this chosen elite.

She glanced back at Spotty. His complexion was blotched. Their eyes met and she dipped her head in a slight nod. Unfortunately, neither Jancy nor Calla Mallanik were enlisted in the Faltane's military, so to them one grunt would look much like another. When the trouble started, as she knew now it would, they would not realize that the odds were stacked against them.

The Chief Priest droned on. The congregation waited in an attentive hush. The wedding party also stood attentive.

Then, shockingly, Prince Rango fidgeted. He shifted from foot to foot. He cleared his throat. The Chief Priest droned on, perhaps at a slightly faster rate.

Prince Rango's unrest migrated to his Guard. The bored ones straightened; the alert ones grasped their sword hilts. In the special section reserved for members of the clergy, a few of the older priests were leaning forward, listening now to the words that tumbled from the Chief Priest's mouth. Confusion crinkled their shaved heads as they realized that what they were hearing was not the wedding ceremony.

"Sif!" Jancy whispered. "It's gonna hit and my ax isn't close!"

"Daggers," Domino muttered, glancing toward the pillow that Calla held.

"Wait!" Prince Rango announced, his voice at its noble best. "What nonsense is this? Who has substituted this drivel for the wedding ceremony?"

"Why, darling," Princess Rissa drawled, "I didn't know you knew Ancient Thermaean..."

Rango/Kalaran stiffened as he realized that he had been caught out of character. It was barely believable that the warrior Prince had become the ardent administrator, but completely impossible that he had suddenly acquired fluency in a long-dead tongue.

"My love," he said in honeyed tones, "I have been reviewing the ceremony in anticipation of this glorious day. I merely thought I heard some discrepancies. By whose right has the ceremony been altered?"

Rissa drew the skull of Kalaran from beneath her bouquet with a grim flourish. Stiller drew his sword. Setting down the satin pillow, Calla produced his bow from under the altar cloth. Domino and Jancy stepped to guard the Princess.

"The ceremony has been altered by my right," Princess Rissa said, and dashed the skull to the marble floor. "We had some questions..."

The skull shattered into flinders of sun-bleached bone, the small figures of the Demon of Darkness and the Messenger of Light bouncing clear. A mist rose from the Messenger of Light, becoming a pale, insubstantial form with the features of Prince Rango. The Prince of mist glowered at the Prince of substance. His eyes glowed blue.

"You have my bride and my body, Kalaran," his voice rang out. "The process is about to be reversed!"

"Deception! Black arts!" yelled Kalaran, "Guards!"

Turmoil erupted in the Cathedral. Wedding guests screamed as Guards drew swords and advanced on the sanctuary. From the row reserved for companions, Rafe and Spite rushed to help. Rafe bore a sword, Spite an oddly shaped wedding gift.

Knowing where the real threat lay, Kalaran lurched toward Jord. Princess Rissa grabbed his arm to slow him.

"Wench!" he scowled.

"Demon!" she returned.

Ibble set down the rings and slid a dagger each to Jancy and Domino. Together, shield maid and cavalry general turned to face the advancing members of the Prince's Guard. Spotty leaped to engage those coming from behind him.

"Do you mean to attack members of your own military," Kalaran shouted, "to slay men who are only doing their job?"

Stiller paused, indecisive. From her post at the Princess's back, Domino also paused.

The same thought was in both their minds: Could they slay men who were only doing their sworn duty to defend their Prince?"

Jancy Gaine didn't pause.

"Fuck that!" she said, thrusting her bridesmaid's bouquet into one guard's face and knifing a second. "I'm a mercenary!"

"Cash and carry!" The ancient elven mercenary's cry rasped from Calla Mallanik's throat as he began firing arrows with near impossible rapidity from his newly repaired silver-strung bow. "Die beautifully, you dumb punks!"

A pair of the Prince's Guard obliged him by reeling forward, plucking at the arrows in their right eye sockets before collapsing over the rail into the clergy section and spattering the entire front row with blood.

"Beautiful!" Jancy cried. "Come on, Domino, get with the program! Aren't you in the uniform of the Princess's Guard?"

Domino glanced down at her lavender-and-lace bridesmaid's dress. A slow smile spread over her face as she tore the sword from a Guardsman's hand.

"For Rissa!" she yelled, stabbing the sword's former owner through the gut. "For Rissa!"

From his place, Stiller Gulick dove into a Guard who was racing to behead Jord.

"It was self-defense," he explained as he beat the man's head against the floor and relieved him of his sword. "Do you have any idea what Domino would do to me if I let Jord get hurt?"

Tossing Rissa to the floor in a sudden burst of cruel strength, Kalaran reached for Jord, only to find Prince Rango blocking his way. Kalaran sought to push him aside, finding to his dismay that his usurped body's arm was merging with the shade of its rightful owner and that Rango had control.

"Disarmed you, have I?" Prince Rango chuckled.

From the floor, Princess Rissa moaned in pain. "Rango, that was terrible!"

"Thank you, darling," the misty Prince replied.

Jancy had few smiles to spare for puns. Her dagger had been wrested from her and she was unfamiliar with the sword she had taken from one of her slain. Three Guards had forced her a few steps away from the Princess and were determinedly wearing her down.

Spite fought her way to Domino's side. She had shapeshifted into a buxom pale green centaur. Without hesitation, Domino grabbed the centaur's shapely soft shoulders and mounted. As she did so, Spite tossed the wedding gift to Jancy.

"Warrior maid," the centaur called, "Castrator!"

The Guard fell back for a moment, their hands falling to cover their privates, believing that the title was one that Jancy claimed. She caught the package neatly and tore away the wrapping from her bearded ax.

"By Hel's black-and-white hair," she gloated, "now this is going to be fucking great!"

Even Ibble and Seth joined the battle that ensued—ring bearer and flower girl back to back, daggers in hand. The slaughter was enormous. The wedding guests froze in terror, knowing that if they fled they might become the next victims.

Through it all, Jord kept reading, though his voice was growing hoarse as he strove to be heard over the turmoil. Joined at the arm with Prince Rango, Kalaran spat at Jord and his spittle became a ball of fire that flew at the poet, growing enormously so that it threatened to engulf both reader and text.

Rissa screamed and struck Kalaran a fierce blow in the kidneys, but she could do nothing for Jord. The fire crisped both the Book of the Service and the robes of the Chief Priest. Then a flash of light burst from Jord's breast. The fire vanished completely, leaving the poet nude and grasping the ancient scroll of Gwykander.

"The amulet Anachron!" Kalaran gasped, "and the scroll! Don't any of you do what you are told?'

Stiller chortled from where he had felled yet another of the Prince's Guard.

" 'Tis a good thing that Domino had initiative, but you have none but yourself to blame for Anachron's presence. It was brought to Caltus by Udan Kann."

"Udan Kann!" the Fallen Sunbird brightened.

"Don't get your hopes up, godlet," Calla Mallanik added, "Udan Kann was slain by Gar Quithnick by means of a delayed death touch. You are alone here."

"Damn Gar Quithnick!" Kalaran cursed. "And damn you! Anachron cannot protect you all!"

Again he spat, this time directing his spittle toward Calla Mallanik. The elf stepped nimbly aside, but Ibble and Seth who had fought to his lee were not so fortunate.

The dwarf took the brunt of the fireball. What remained spilled over onto the girl.

"You bastard!" Prince Rango yelled as the two small forms toppled to the floor. "I have had enough!"

He grabbed the demigod, shaking him as if to wrest him from the body he had stolen. With an aplomb that only poetry reading could have trained him for, nude and singed, Jord continued to read.

"Quatendo erbud, altonfuss dermain! Akanetendo, ranma! Tendo soon, pan gen da ma! Royu gah haf!"

The Prince's shaking effectively kept the demigod from effecting another spell as the final words of the ancient exorcism split Kalaran's immortal soul from Prince Rango's body.

On the sanctuary floor, the tiny figurine of the Demon of Darkness glowed with the blackness between the stars. Then, as once Kalaran had captured the Prince, the figurine captured the demigod's immortal essence.

Battle ceased as Jord's chanting finished and all the combatants realized that the true fight was won. Prince Rango swept Rissa to her feet just as she was about to land another punch in his kidneys. She looked into his eyes and smiled.

"This is my Prince!" she declaimed in a loud, clear voice.

Spontaneous applause rose from where the guests sat—though everyone was too polite to wonder aloud whether the intensity was due to the return of the Prince or to the fact that the guests now knew they would not be slaughtered as a wedding sacrifice.

Domino swung down from Spite's back and hurried into the sanctuary, but she didn't spare even an appreciative glance for Jord. Instead she rushed to the two charred heaps on the marble floor by the altar. Calla Mallanik shook his aristocratic head sorrowfully and tried to stop her.

"They're gone," he said. "You can do nothing more."

"Maybe," Domino said, pushing past him. "Jord, bring that damned amulet here."

The poet hurried over, his shapely ass drawing appreciative comments from the audience. He pulled Anachron over his head and held it to Seth's breast.

"That's right," he said softly, "it has the power to heal."

"But not to resurrect," Domino added anxiously, "I only hope that we're not too late!"

A glow far purer than the fires of the Fallen Sunbird rose from the amulet and suffused the burnt child. Absolute silence fell within the Cathedral of Dym, broken by wild cheering as Seth shook off the charred remnants of her flower girl's frock and sat up.

Domino clasped the girl to her heart and Rissa knelt and slashed off ten feet of her lace-embroidered train to cover her.

"Thank you, Your Highness," the girl whispered, looking down in wonder at the amulet, "and thank you, Anachron."

"Ibble!" Stiller cried. "Use the amulet on Ibble, Domino."

But as Domino reached for the glowing amulet, it shimmered, faded, and was gone.

"It's vanished!" the Princess cried. "But where has it gone?"

"Back to Gelfait, I'd wager," Stiller said, looking down at the corpse of his companion. "Gar Quithnick must not be dead after all, but Gelfait's position out of time delayed the amulet's return to him."

"What an irony," Jord declaimed from where he was stripping a set of pants and a uniform jacket from a recently slain Guard. "Gar lives but is lost to us forever and the amulet's flight to him has robbed us of Ibble as well."

"Well, not really," came a familiar voice from the small charred heap on the floor, "we dwarves are pretty tough, you know. We're particularly well-protected from fire. Wouldn't be worth much as smiths if we weren't."

A second spate of applause, this one flavored with hearty laughter followed the dwarf's announcement. Stiller bent and embraced his friend.

"Brush yourself off and find some pants," he said. "We have a wedding and a coronation to complete!"

"Wait!" twittered a female voice as Daisy hurried from the rear of the Cathedral. "You can't mean to continue the ceremony with bodies all about and half of the wedding party soaked with blood and gore!"

Rissa looked at Rango and the Prince nodded, embracing her about the waist. Then the Princess spoke.

"We do and we will! After all we have been through, the wedding must not be delayed." She looked at the older woman and relented slightly. "Very well, there will be a brief intermission to clear away the bodies."

"What shall we do with this, Rissa?" Jancy asked, picking the figurine of Darkness from the floor.

"Can you hold on to it for now?" Rissa asked. "Disposing of that is going to take some thought."

As the bodies were cleared away, Lemml Touday and Fenelais were roused from their bench in the sacristy. Clad in his second-best robes, the Chief Priest came forth and officiated, Lemml in the place of honor at his side. The Book of the Service was gone, but the memory of the ritual remained and if it was a bit shorter, that was all for the best.

Newly wed, the Prince and Princess knelt before the Chief Priest to be coronated the new King and Queen of the Faltane. Their trusted comrades stood in a half circle behind them, battered and bloodied faces glowing with pride.

Only Ibble stood apart, the cushion with the crowns in his broad dwarvish hands. He studied the crowns as the Chief Priest intoned a prayer requesting that the new rulers be just and wise and brave in the rulership of their kingdom. When the Chief Priest reached for the King's crown to set it on Rango's head, the dwarf interrupted.

"Uh, do you really mean what you just said there in that prayer?"

The Chief Priest stared at him in puzzlement, "Of course I do, Ibble. Do you think we want a ruler like Kalaran for the Faltane?"

The dwarf shrugged. "I just wanted to make certain it wasn't one of those pro forma things. I never know with humans. I remember when Stiller was teaching the dragon poker—"

"Ibble," Stiller interrupted, "do you have a point?"

"Sure, Stiller," Ibble said, "I was studying these crowns here and you know that dwarves are great craftsmen, right?"

"Right."

"Well, I'd like a second opinion from Calla, but I'd say that these crowns have been enchanted to make them control devices. No points for guessing who would be doing the controlling."

"Kalaran!" Prince Rango gasped.

Calla Mallanik rose from his inspection of the crowns and nodded agreement.

"Yes, Your Highness, I would guess that the Fallen Sunbird, being immortal, had designs on your kingdom far exceeding a human life span. Through these crowns he could control the new King, after your death."

"And the Queen while she was yet alive!" Jancy said in horror. "Sif's shining hair, that's ugly!"

A faint cursing could be heard from the sash of her gown where she had stowed the figurine containing the imprisoned demigod.

"If these crowns are cursed," Prince Rango said, "then let the coronation be continued but let us be coronated without crowns!"

"That's fine with me," Rissa said, with a faint shudder as she looked at the crown destined for her and contemplated what Kalaran might have intended, "I've never like crowns. They're terribly uncomfortable."

The coronation was concluded without further incident. As the congregation rose to cheer their new King and Queen the Cathedral of Dym shook and shimmered. The vision of each person within blurred and when it cleared, they found that they were standing within a rounded building as large as the vanished Cathedral but without a roof so that it was open to the sky.

Across that sky, three green comets looped in increasingly erratic patterns.

"What is this?" King Rango asked.

"An arena of sorts," Stiller offered, "or a stadium."

They looked about. The congregation was now seated in the round, those who had been on the ground floor in small, hard seats, those who had been in the balconies on wooden bleachers. The royal wedding party stood on a mound amid a broad, grassy field that had been marked into a diamond with solid lines of white paint. Small shelters stood where the sacristies had been.

"I think I know what has happened," Jord Inder said. "Kalaran did not lie when he said that the presence of so many magical artifacts could cause a rift between time and space. The strange phenomena faded somewhat after we left on our quests, but Caltus remained fraught with them. Now we have gathered again several magical artifacts of great power in one place."

"The scroll!" Domino said, picking it up from the grass.

"The crowns!" Ibble added, looking down at them.

"The Demon of Darkness," Jancy said, pulling it from her girdle, "or the Imprisoned Fallen Sunbird, if you'd prefer."

"The weakened fabric of reality cannot tolerate their presence," Calla Mallanik agreed, "and I really dread telling you what the solution is."

"A quest!" groaned Stiller, the blotches rising on his face.

"Three quests," Calla corrected.

"I guess we could take the scroll back to the Lakes," Domino said. "For real this time. It shouldn't be that bad. There aren't many bandits left."

"If the crowns are not as powerful as the other artifacts, I could lose them in a game of poker," Stiller said. "I promised Schmirnov I'd come back after the wedding."

"The Demon of Darkness is a harder call," Queen Rissa said. "Jancy?"

"I'd love to get rid of the old bastard," Jancy replied, "and I didn't much fancy going along on your honeymoon. Calla, are you with me?"

"As long as I don't have to enlist," the elf promised. "The kingdom rewards its heroes a lot better than it pays their soldiers."

"Let me join you," Ibble said, "I'd feel much safer if we encase that damn thing in some of my magic dwarven rock when we ditch it. A figurine could be tempting, but who'd want a chunk of ugly rock?"

"Then it is agreed," King Rango declaimed, "but reality will have to bear the strain long enough for you all to attend the wedding reception. Look, the stewards are bringing in the refreshments, even now."

Dressed in white trousers and shirts, with trays slung suspended from their necks, stewards were moving through the seats and the stands handing paper cups of drink and bags of peanuts and popcorn to the gathered guests.

Daisy led a few stewards over to the royal party.

"The weather's so lovely that I've ordered tables be set for you here on the lawn," she said. "But I fear I must report that the wine has spoiled—all we have is that sweet, frothy brown drink and plenty of ice."

The wedding party groaned, but the new King took a tentative sip from his cup.

"Sweet," he said, "but I rather like it."

Rissa laughed and held him close. "I guess that Kalaran got that awful habit from you. I should have known!"

Minstrels struck up drums and flutes in light dance tunes and the military band spelled them with merry marches. Occasional riffs of the amplified strings and bass were heard from the unseen world beyond. The new King and Queen held out their hands to their comrades.

"Come," Queen Rissa said, "join us in a circle dance to celebrate new beginnings."

As they spun on the flat, grassy lawn, overhead the three comets finished their twisting course and exploded into each other, sprinkling the heavens with a dusting of stars, bright against even the daytime sky. Not even the giant lizard that snapped at the trailing sparks could dim their brilliance.

Notes

Many fantasies involve a quest to retrieve powerful talismans that reside in half-forgotten, difficult to reach places. At the quest's conclusion, after Good has triumphed, what then? What to do with the mighty talismans now gathered in one place? What does "Happily Ever After" *really* mean? Zelazny outlined a humorous novel. Four magical items that have served their purpose must be returned and hidden away to save the world from their combined power: an amulet (Anachron), ring (Sombrosio), sword (Mothganger), and scroll (Gwykander). He invited four authors to write these reverse-quests, and he wrote a five-part frame to connect them. Zelazny completed *Forever After*, and it appeared posthumously with an afterword by David Drake. Assembled here are Zelazny's four Preludes and the Postlude and a short summary of each intervening tale.

Flensed means that the skin and fat have been stripped from the carcass. ***Pro forma*** means done by rote or observing only the forms. **Déclassé** is low-class.

IKHNATON'S HYMN TO THE SUN

Flare, by Roger Zelazny and Thomas T. Thomas, Baen 1992 (extracts).
Fully: *Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation,* DNA Publications 1996.

The day comes lovely to the sky's edge,
living Aton, opener of life's gate.
Rising at the eastern rim of the world,
you fill the lands with your glory.

Great, glowing, high above the Earth,
you send rays to brighten the land,
filling with light all that you have made.
You are Re, making all things captive,
binding them with your love.
Distant, you shed your light upon us.
Striding on high, your footprints are the day.

Setting at the world's edge, the west,
the Earth beneath you comes into the darkness of the dead,
who sleep in their chambers, heads wrapped,
unbreathing, unable to look upon each other;
their possessions are stolen from beneath their heads
and they know it not.
The lion comes forth from his den,
the serpent stings, the world is silence.
He that made all things goes to rest
beyond his horizon. He restores himself.

Bright is the Earth when you rise.
When you shine as Aton by day

you drive away the darkness.
You light the Two Lands into daily festivity,
awakening them, raising them up.
The people bathe and dress themselves,
raise up their arms in thanks to the dawn
for a new day in which to do their work.

The cattle stir in their pastures,
trees put forth leaves,
birds call through the marshes, fluttering,
wings raised in praise of your day.
Sheep dance in their fields
and all winged things fly,
living in your light.

Ships sail up and down the rivers.
Travelers pass on the highways with dawn.
Fish leap from the streams.
Your rays shine amid ocean's great green.

Creator of seed in man and egg in woman,
giver of life to the son within his mother,
you soothe him in life that he may not weep,
provide for him in the womb,
and give him breath when he comes forth
on the day of his birth.
You open his mouth to speech and nourishment.

When the fledgling opens the egg
you give to him the breath of life.
When you have brought him together
to the breaking of the egg
he comes forth singing with all of his heart,
he goes about on two feet, rejoicing that he lives.

How great are your works!
Hidden are your ways from our regard,
only god, of powers no other possesses.
You created the Earth, of light and your love,
while you were alone:
humanity, and creatures of all sizes,
to go forth upon it;
and all that are on high,

soaring on outspread wings;
and the foreign countries, Syria and Kush;
Egypt, where you set everyone in his place,
provide for his needs…

You bring forth the waters of the Nile
to preserve the people.
How perfect are your designs,
Lord of eternity!
There is a Nile in the sky
for the strangers, for the cattle of every land…

Your rays feed every garden.
The plants grow by your light.
You make the seasons to fulfill your work:
Winter for coolness;
heat, that they may taste of your essence.
You made the sky within which you rise
to regard the work you have done.

Dawning, shining, passing and returning,
you have made all things of yourself, by yourself:
cities and tribes, roads and rivers.
All eyes see you daily,
Aton over the Earth.

You shine into my heart,
your son, Ikhnaton,
bringing this wisdom.
You have shown me your designs,
how you hold the world in your hand,
how your comings and goings bring life and death,
how we live through you,
our eyes upon your glory,
until you set, and all labor is put away.

You did construct the Earth,
raise up my race, oh Sun,
and I, Ikhnaton, whose life has been long,
and my beloved wife, Mistress of the Two Lands,
Nefer-nefru-aton, Nofretete,
thank you,
living and flourishing down the ages.

A Word from Zelazny

Excerpts from this poem served as section breaks for the collaborative novel *Flare*. "It's 'Ikhnaton's Hymn to the Sun,' the heretical Egyptian Pharaoh. I used [Robert] Lowell's concept of 'imitations,' where you read translations till the meaning is clear to you, then recast the meaning into an English version to your own taste. The most recent translation of the original 'Hymn' was 1898, very Victorian, so I recast the entire thing, say five or six pages double-spaced, in free verse, my interpretation. Then sections appropriate to the narrative of the novel were taken out and used."[1]

" 'The Hymn to the Sun,' which is seventh century Egyptian, was actually ripped off by the psalmist and became the basis for the 104th Psalm. So what I did was put together a manuscript with an introduction, explaining Robert Lowell's theory of imitation, and then talking about my piece. Then I have the complete version of 'Hymn to the Sun,' and then an appendix containing the 104th Psalm [Appendix A in the chapbook], to show the similarities."[2]

Notes

Ikhnaton was an ancient Egyptian king who changed his name from Amenhotep IV to honor the god **Aton** (Ikhnaton means "Aton is satisfied"). He embraced monotheism, declaring that Aton, the sun, was the only god, and he was Aton's son. He allowed no exceptions, and he defaced the names of other gods on the temples. When he died, the cult of Aton died with him. His mummy was destroyed, and most traces of his name were obliterated. His wife was Queen **Nefertiti**, Tutankhamen's aunt. **Re** was the Egyptian sun god's name before Ikhnaton elevated his stature and renamed him. **Two Lands** is the ancient Egyptian name for Egypt. **Kush** was a region in northeast Africa, home to the biblical people of Cush; it corresponds to Ethiopia. **Nefer-nefru-aton** and **Nofretete** are alternate spellings of Nefertiti.

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[1] *Critical Wave #33*, November 1993.

[2] *Absolute Magnitude* Fall/Winter 1994.

THE RATIONAL GODS

Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky;* previously unpublished.

[The rational gods all speak Greek, language of the winedark sea; not the sky-talk of Sanskrit—species of sunspotted static—nor Hebrew, rolling dark rocks down its mountain trail.]

I. Okeān

Intermittent powers of surf rehearsed the heart…
Night and the sea give birth to gods.

II. In Time of Choir

In coil of sea foam
lashed beside our bark
the hair of unsuspected deity
snares a daytime pragmatist,

now beyond glories of sunspotted roar
the blood-bent moon hovers,
hosting magnanimous a plentitude of star,
scoring sky-possessed citadel
the hymn of sidereal beat…

Night and the sea froth blood to chain.

III. The Other

Kaleidoscope and cosmic smile,
eclipsing avatars of individual refreshment!

The politics of gods vitiate organic growth
in sessions of sky-filling wave;
surf and the season syncopate deific obfuscations
the blurt of arterial spray;
and each man returns to the womb many times
through his life.

Blood and the sea god night.

Notes

Sanskrit was the liturgical or high speech of ancient India. **Okeān** means ocean. A **pragmatist** is a practical person. **Magnanimous** is generous and forgiving. **Sidereal** means related to the stars. In mythology **avatars** are physical incarnations of gods; since Zelazny wrote this poem, avatars have become the symbols that represent a person on-line. To **vitiate** is to corrupt. To **syncopate** means to emphasize musical notes off the regular beat. **Deific** means divine. **Obfuscation** is the act of deliberately causing confusion.

LADY OF STEEL

Chicks in Chainmail, ed. Esther Friesner, Baen 1995.

Uttering a curse in his well-practiced falsetto, Cora swung his blade and cut down the opposing swords-woman. His contoured breastplate emphasized features which were not truly present.

Simultaneous then, attacks came from the right and the left. Beginning his battle-song, he parried to the left, cut to the right, parried left again, cut through that warrior, parried right, and thrust. Both attackers fell.

“Well done, sister!” shouted Edwina, the aging axe-woman, from where she stood embattled ten feet away. High compliment from a veteran!

Smiling, Cora prepared for another onslaught, recalling when he had been Corak the cook but months before. He had had a dream then, and now he was living it.

He had thought of being a great warrior, laying about him in battle, famed in song and story for his prowess. How he had practiced with the blade! Until one day he realized he need also practice his walk and his speech—as well as shaving closely and clandestinely every day—if he were ever to realize that dream. So he did. And one day he disappeared, Cora appeared weeks later, and a legend was born. Several months into the campaign now, and he was not only accepted but celebrated—Cora, Lady of Steel.

But the enemy, too, had heard of him, and all seemed anxious to claim the glory of reaping his head. Perspiration broke out on his brow as five warriors moved to engage him. The first he took out quickly with a surprise rush. The others—more wary now—fought conservatively, seeking to wear him down. His arms ached by the time he had dealt with the second. His battle-song broke as he dispatched the third and took a cut deep in his right thigh from one of the others. He faltered.

"Courage, sister!" shouted Edwina, hacking her way toward him.

He could barely defend himself against the nearer warrior as Edwina took out the fourth. Finally, he stumbled, knowing he could not rise in time to save himself from the death-blow.

At the last moment, however, an axe flashed and his final assailant's head rolled away in the direction of her retreating sisters.

"Rest!" Edwina ordered, taking up a defensive position above him. "They flee! We have the field!"

He lay there, clutching his thigh and watching the retreat, fighting to retain consciousness. "Good," he said. This was the closest it had ever been…

After a time, Edwina helped him to his feet. "Well-acquitted, Steel Lady," she said. "Lean on me. I'll help you back to camp."

Inside her tent, the fractured leg-armor removed, she bathed the wound. "This will not cripple you," she said. "We'll have you good as new shortly."

But the wound extended higher. Suddenly, she had drawn aside his loincloth to continue her ministrations. He heard her gasp.

"Yes," he said then. "You know my secret. It was the only way for me to distinguish myself—to show that I could do the work as well or better than a woman."

"I must say that you have," Edwina admitted. "I remember your prowess at Oloprat, Tanquay, and Pord. You are a most unusual man. I respect you for what you have done."

"You will help me keep my secret then?" he asked. "Let me complete the campaign? Let me make a record to show the world a man can do this work, too?"

She studied him, then winked, pinched his fanny, and smiled.

"I'm sure we can work something out," she said.

Notes

Zelazny drew criticism because his early work had no strong female characters, and he corrected that with Mari in "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai" (see afterword to that story). Here, Zelazny's strong female characters and irreverent humor manage to poke fun at a few gender stereotypes.

Falsetto is a man's falsely high singing or speaking voice. **Parried** means warded off a blow. **Clandestinely** means secretly, often to conceal an illicit act.

THE THREE DESCENTS OF JEREMY BAKER

Manuscript title: "Masters of Time."
VB Tech Journal Vol 1 No 5, June 1995.
#5 on 1996 Locus poll (short story).

I

Jeremy Baker was the only survivor when the *Raven*'s Warton-Purg drive delivered the vessel to the vicinity of a black hole. Its tidal forces immediately did their stuff. The hull groaned and cracked as indicators screamed the ship's situation and listed its problems. Jeremy, who had been somewhat bored, had been in the possibly enviable position of testing his powerful extravehicular survival suit at the time of the disaster. He had on everything but the helmet, which he promptly donned. Then he hurried to the control station with the intention of activating the Warton-Purg drive again in hopes of fleeing through extracurricular space—though under the circumstances it was more likely to cause the *Raven* to explode. But then the *Raven* was exploding anyway and it was worth a shot.

He never made it.

The vessel came apart about him. He thought he glimpsed the jumpsuited figure of one of his crewmates spinning amid the debris, but he could not be certain.

Suddenly, he was alone. Pieces of the *Raven* drifted away from him. He took a sip of the suit's water, wondering when he would feel a great heaviness in his feet as they were drawn down the gravity well faster than the rest of him—or perhaps it would be his head. He was uncertain as to his orientation. Still half in shock, he scanned the sky, peering into a star-occluding blackness. There. It would be his right arm where the stretching would begin. At least it would be an interesting way to die, he reflected. Not too many people had gotten to try it, though there had been a lot of colorful speculation.

He seemed to drift for a long while, musing on final splendors, without detecting any unusual sensations other than occasionally glimpsing what seemed a small, local patch of flickering light. He could not be certain as to its source. After a time, he felt an uncontrollable drowsiness and he slept.

"That's better," a voice seemed to be saying to him a bit later. "Seems to be working fine."

"Who—What are you?" Jeremy asked.

"I'm a Fleep," came the answer. "I'm that flickering patch of light you were wondering about a while back."

"You live around here?"

"I have for a long while, Jeremy. It's easy if you're an energy being with a lot of psi powers."

"That's how we're conversing?"

"Yes. I installed a telepathic function in your mind while I had you unconscious."

"Why aren't I being stretched into miles of spaghetti right now?"

"I created an antigravity field between you and the black hole. They cancel."

"Why'd you help me?"

"It's good to have someone new to talk to. Sometimes I get bored with my fellow Fleep."

"Oh, there's a whole colony of you?"

"Sure. This is a great place to study physics, and we're all into such pursuits."

"It doesn't seem an environment where life would develop."

"True. We were once a race of material beings but we were sufficiently evolved that when we saw our sun was going to go supernova we elected to transform ourselves into this state and study it rather than flee. In fact, that black hole used to be our sun. Makes a great lab. Come on, I'll show you. You can see more than you used to because I fiddled with your senses, too. I increased their range. For one thing, you should be able to detect a halo of Hawking radiation above the event horizon."

"Yes. Lavender, violet, purple… It's rather lovely. If I kept going and passed through the event horizon would my image really be captured there forever? Could I come back and see myself frozen at that moment?"

"Yes, and no. Yes, you would clutter up the view with your arrested light. No, you couldn't come back and see yourself doing it. There's no way out once you go in."

"I phrased it poorly. Say, if there are other Fleep, there must be something special to call you to distinguish you."

"Call me Nik," the other said.

"Okay, Nik. What are those pinpoints of fire ahead? And the huge dark masses about them?"

"Those are my people, performing an experiment. I've been moving us at a very high velocity."

"I've noticed that the hole covers a lot more of the sky now. What sort of experiment?"

"Those great dark masses are the remnants of tens of thousands of suns and planets we've transported here. You only see the ones in space proper. We pull them out as we need them. We're shooting them into the hole."

"Why?"

"To increase its rate of rotation."

"Uh—To what end?"

"The creation of closed timelike curves."

"You've got me on that one."

"Time loops. To permit us to run backward through the past."

"Any successes so far?"

"Yes. A few."

"Have you got anything that might permit me to get back to the *Raven* before the explosion?"

"That's pushing it. But it's one of the things I wanted to check."

They matched velocities with the flickering congregation, and Nik took him into the vicinity of the largest of these beings. The conversation that followed resembled heat lightning.

"Vik says there's one that might do it," Nik told him after a time.

"Let me use it. Please."

"You should also have strength of mind sufficient to alter your velocity by thought alone," Nik said. "Come this way."

Jeremy followed him by willing it until, abruptly, he faced a mass of lines which resembled a computer design suddenly generated in free space.

"I did that just to make you conscious of it," Nik said. "Enter the trapezoid to your left."

"If this works I may not see you again. I'd better say thanks now."

"Noted with pleasure, though I'd like to have kept you longer, for full conversations. I understand your state of mind, however. Go."

Jeremy entered the trapezoid.

In an instant, everything changed. He was back aboard the *Raven*, standing wearing his suit, helmet in hand. Immediately, he rushed toward the control station, donning his helmet as he went. He felt the familiar drop into space proper. The tidal forces took hold of the *Raven*, and it began to groan and creak.

He could see the switches for the Warton-Purg drive and he extended his arm, reaching. Then the ship came apart and he was drawn away from the controls. He glimpsed a jumpsuited human form, turning and turning.

Later, drifting he met a Nik who did not recall him but who quickly understood his explanation as to what had occurred.

"Am I still in the closed timelike curve?" Jeremy asked.

"Oh, yes. I know of no way of departing a CTC till it's run its course," Nik replied. "In fact, theoretically, if you could do it you'd wind up inside the black hole."

"Guess things get to run their course then. But listen, this time around it was a little different than the first time."

"Yes. Your classical physics is deterministic, but this isn't classical physics."

"I actually got close to the *Raven*'s controls. I wonder…"

"What?"

"You've installed a form of telepathy in my mind. Could you also teach me something—telekinetic, perhaps—that would give me the ability to hold a bubble of air around my head for a minute or two. I'm convinced that slowing to put on the helmet was what kept me from reaching the controls."

"We'll see what we can do. Take a nap."

When Jeremy awoke he had the ability to move small objects with his mind. He tested this by removing units from his tool kit, having them orbit his arms, his legs, his head, and returning them without touching them physically.

"I think I've got it, Nik. Thanks."

"You're an interesting study, Jeremy."

This time when he entered the trapezoid he had his mind flexed, and he gathered the bubble of air to him as he rushed toward the control station.

He waited, his hand hovering above the appropriate bank of lights, for the Warton-Purg drive to drop the *Raven* into space proper. The lights went out. Immediately, he ran his hand across the row, illuminating them again.

Simultaneous with the clutch of the tidal forces, he felt the explosion from the rear of the vessel. The manual had been right. Reactivating the drive immediately following shut down was hazardous to the health. He pulled on his helmet as a sheet of flame flashed toward him. The suit's insulation protected him from the heat as the *Raven* came apart. This time he did not see the jumpsuited figure.

Again, he drifted.

When Nik rescued him, he told him the story.

"...So, either way I lose," he concluded.

"So it would seem," Nik said.

When the CTC ran its course and Nik went off to report the results of the latest trip to Vik, Jeremy looked toward the event horizon with his enhanced senses.

He was aware of his antigrav field now, could even manipulate it with his mind. He was certain that he could control it sufficiently to keep himself unstretched or unsquashed at least between here and the layer beneath the violet band.

"What the hell," he said.

He wondered what sort of final image he would leave for eternity.

II

He descended quickly toward the devouring sphere, and soon it was as if he fled among the curtains of an Aurora Borealis. At one point it seemed that Nik might have called after him, but he could not be certain. Not that it mattered. What had he left of life even with the kindly Fleep? His suit's oxygen, water, and nutrients would dwindle toward an unpleasant end and there was no chance of anyone coming to his rescue. Best to pass in this blaze of glory seeing what no man had seen before, leaving his small signature upon the universe.

As the waves rose to embrace him, the colors darkened, darkened, were gone. He was alone in a black place and without sensation. Had he actually penetrated the black hole and survived, or was this but his final, drawn-out thought in a time-distorting field?

"The former," Nik said from a place that seemed nearby.

"Nik! You're here with me!"

"Indeed. I decided to follow you and give what assistance I could."

"As you entered did you see the image I left behind on the event horizon?"

"Sorry, I didn't look."

"Are we into the singularity?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I've never been this way before. The process may be one of infinite infall."

"But I thought that all information was destroyed once it entered a black hole."

"Well, there is more than one school of thought on that. Information is necessarily bound up with energy, and one notion is that it might remain coherent in here but simply become totally inaccessible to the outside world. The information cannot exist independently from the energy, and this way of considering it has the advantage of preserving energy conservation."

"Then it must be so."

"On the other hand, when your body was destroyed as we entered here I was able to run you quickly through the process by which I became an immortal energy being. Thought you might appreciate it."

"Immortal? You mean I might be an infinitely infalling consciousness here for the effective life of the universe? I don't think I could bear it."

"Oh, you'd go mad before too long and it wouldn't make any difference."

"Shit!" Jeremy said.

There was a long silence, then a chuckle from Nik.

"I remember what that is," he finally said.

"And we're in it without paddles," Jeremy noted.

III

"There is another factor in our case," Nik said after an eternity or a few minutes, whichever came first.

"What is that?" Jeremy asked.

"When I talked to Vik he mentioned that we've messed so much with this black hole and its rotation that we might have provoked an unusual situation."

"What's that?"

"It's theoretically possible for a black hole to explode. He thought that this one was about to. Seeing it happen is sort of a once-in-a-lifetime affair."

"What goes on when it blows?"

"I'm not sure and neither was Vik. The cornucopion hypothesis would seem most in keeping with our present situation, though."

"Better tell me about it so it won't come as a complete surprise."

"It holds that when it blows it leaves behind a horn-shaped remnant smaller than an atom, weighing about a hundred-thousandth of a gram. Its volume would be unlimited, though, and it would contain all of the information that ever fell into the black hole. That, of course, would include us."

"Would it be any easier to get out of a cornucopion than out of a black hole?"

"Not here it wouldn't be. Once our information leaves our universe it stays gone."

"What do you mean 'not here'? Is there a loophole if it gets moved someplace else?"

"Well, if it could be bounced past the Big Crunch and the next Big Bang and wind up in our successor universe its contents might be accessible. We only know for sure that they're barred from release in *this* universe."

"Sounds like a long wait."

"You never know what time will be doing in a place like that, though. Or this."

"It's been interesting knowing you, Nik. I'll give you that."

"You, too, Jeremy. Now I don't know whether to tell you to open your sensory channels to the fullest or to shut them down as far as you can."

"Why? Or why not?"

"I can feel the explosion coming on."

There followed an intense sensation of white light which seemed to go on and on and on until Jeremy felt himself slipping away. He struggled to retain his coherency, hoped he was succeeding.

Slowly, he became aware that he inhabited a vast library, bookshelves sweeping off in either direction, periodically pierced by cross-corridors.

"Where are we?" he finally asked.

"I was able to create a compelling metaphor, allowing you to coordinate your situation," Nik replied. "This is the cornucopion within which all of the information is stored. We inhabit a bookshelf ourselves. I gave you a nice blue leather cover, embossed, hubbed spine."

"Thanks. What do we do now, to pass the time?"

"I think we should be able to establish contact with the others. We can start reading them."

"I'll try. I hope they're interesting. How do we know whether we've made it into the next universe and freedom?"

"Hopefully, somebody will stop by to check us out."

Jeremy extended his consciousness to a smart red volume across the way.

"Hello," he said. "You are…?"

"History," the other stated. "And yourself?"

"Autobiography," Jeremy replied. "You know, we're going to need a catalogue, so we can leave a Recommended Reading List on top."

"What's that?"

"I'll write it myself," he said. "Let's get acquainted."

A Word from Zelazny

"[This story] used theoretical concepts in physics recently put forth by respectable physicists. I thought it would be fun to try to combine them all into one story."[1]

Notes

Hawking radiation is thermal radiation thought to be emitted by black holes due to quantum effects, causing the black hole to shrink (Hawking evaporation) if it emits more energy than it takes in. The **Aurora Borealis** or Northern Lights is the glow in the northern sky created by collisions of charged particles in the upper atmosphere. The **cornucopion hypothesis** refers to the theoretical horn-shaped particles that occur as an end point of a black hole's Hawking evaporation.

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[1] *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, July 1995.

THE SLEEPER:
CHARACTER OUTLINE

Written late 1980s or early 1990s; previously unpublished.
§ *Wild Cards*

NAME: Croyd Crenson.

AGE: Depends on how you look at it. Mentally, he's missed a lot of living time during his comas—put all of his periods of wakefulness together and he's probably somewhere in his twenties; physiologically, he is regenerated and changed each time that he sleeps; chronologically, he was born in 1933.

APPEARANCE: Varies, from sleeping time to waking time. Nothing about it seems to be an invariant.

HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS: Abnormally great strength at almost all times. Is capable of sustaining a fantastic beating and still functioning. During his comas he recovers fully from all injuries. Has an enormous appetite because of his fierce waking metabolism, though he never seems excessively overweight. Tended to pig out on anything in his earlier years, but grew more discriminating with the passage of time, eventually becoming something of a gourmet. He is perhaps the only person who can match Hiram Worchester mouthful for mouthful at dining.

He'd completed 8th grade and achieved puberty at the time of Jetboy's death. He vividly recalls the years of chaos which followed.

He saw his father die during the panic in '46. His mother (Janet) and his younger brother and sister (Carl and Claudia) made it to New Jersey with him. There, he succumbed to the spore infection and experienced his first coma. (Neither of his siblings was infected.) Upon awakening he had enhanced strength and the ability to levitate. He immediately employed these abilities to steal food and feed the family. The following day he slept. He was still strong upon awakening ten days later, his hair and eyes having grown lighter; he had lost the ability to levitate, and he now possessed ultrasensitive hearing and the ability to see polarized light. The next time it was a TK ability. The next, an ability to build up electrical charges within himself and release them at will. And so on. He remains strong. He loses his extra ability and gains a new one each time that he sleeps. He lives in fear of waking up, hideously deformed, diseased, dying—or of not waking up at all. As a result of this uncertainty and the length of the coma (anywhere from a week to a month) he comes to dread sleep as if it were death itself.

When society stabilizes later, he cannot return to school because of his affliction. Nor can he hold a job. He tries amphetamines when he is 15, to prolong his periods of wakefulness. The pills become a way of life for him. He takes one to stay awake "a little longer," promising himself that this time he'll not go too far, that he'll go to bed "the next day." Later he takes another, for "a little more time." After that he loses count.

He goes without the pills for the first few days after awakening, during which time he is a normal-seeming, relatively decent fellow who drinks a lot of coffee. He thinks nothing of stealing because he has no other way of getting things he wants and needs, but he will not normally use his powers to harm anyone. When he goes on the speed, though, he grows progressively manic, becoming extremely dangerous near the end of a week-long waking cycle. Like a rabid animal he tries to avoid others then, but this is difficult in a large urban center. Finally, he crashes, sleeps, wakes, and the cycle is repeated.

His mother dies in the mid-'50s. His brother and sister marry and go their ways. He eventually works out a survival pattern. He maintains numerous apartments about town—including Jokertown. He pays their rents far in advance. He tries to make it to the nearest of these before he crashes. There are a few people he trusts, of necessity—usually Jokers he has helped in one way or another or whom he pays. If any of these find him in an alley or doorway or on a park bench, they transport him to one of his hideaways, put him to bed, and turn on the radio. (He has a feeling that he might subconsciously absorb something of the news or educational programming while he sleeps. There may be something to this, as he occasionally awakens knowing things which transpired while he was out.) He burns out a lot of radios.

His usual routine on awakening is to bathe, shave if he needs to, don fresh clothing, go out and buy a newspaper, a copy of *Life* and/or *Time,* and head for a diner or restaurant for an enormous hours-long meal. He reads while he eats, visits an acquaintance or two afterwards to let them know he's back in circulation and to continue whatever deals they might be involved in. He then plans and executes a robbery or two to keep up his supply of rent money, ready cash and pills. (By the '80s he is more sophisticated, having developed some taste in the decoration of his numerous hideaways. He has also invested some of his excess loot and usually no longer has to steal, unless the market is bad or unforeseen expenses arise. This frees the use of his lucid time from survival imperatives and permits him to begin seeking some means of ameliorating his condition. He tries other drugs and techniques but usually winds up back on speed.)

He is capable of friendship, though he has fewer opportunities than most for making friends. In his lucid phases he feels guilt for some of the things he did during his manic phases.

In that his nervous system is involved in his condition in some very intricate ways, Dr. Tachyon gives him only one chance in four of returning to full normalcy following a "cure." It is more likely that he would suffer damages equivalent to a cerebrovascular accident on being restored to powerlessness and a normal sleep cycle. Partial paralysis, speech impediment, or impaired mental ability—or all of the above—strike Croyd as the equivalent of being a Joker without any of the possible benefits. Tachyon encourages him to crash at his clinic whenever he can, so that he can study the condition further. But Croyd doesn't like the place. It brings back bad memories of the '40s.

He likes the food at Aces High and usually dines there at least once a month. Because of his changing appearance he is seldom recognized even by those he has fought in the past, though a telepathic

Ace can sometimes spot him by more basic means. (Not always, though. His eccentric neurophysiology may on occasion provide an effective mental screen.) Many of his rampages over the years have been attributed to a whole succession of different individuals, rather than the quiet-looking man seated at the next table.

There are times when he is almost noble, times when he is pathetic, and times when he is a raving lunatic.

Notes

Zelazny created this outline to help other authors understand Croyd Crenson, the character he created for *Wild Cards*. It incorporates details but contradicts others from his earlier contributions to the Wild Cards series, so he might have written it later, possibly in the early 1990s.

CONCERTO FOR SIREN AND SEROTONIN

Wild Cards V: Down and Dirty, ed. George R. R. Martin, Bantam/Spectra 1988.
§ *Wild Cards*

I

Sitting shade-clad in a booth at Vito's Italian, odd-hour and quiet, lowering a mound of linguini and the level in a straw-bound bottle—black hair stiff with spray or tonic—the place's only patron had drawn attention from the staff in the form of several wagers, in that this was his seventh entrée, when a towering civilian with a hand like a club came in off the street and stood near, watching, also, through bloodshot eyes.

The man continued to stare at the diner, who finally swung his mirror lenses toward him.

"You the one I'm looking for?" the newcomer asked.

"Maybe so," the diner replied, lowering his fork, "if it involves money and certain special skills."

The big man smiled. Then he raised his right hand and dropped it. It struck the edge of the table, removed the corner, shredded the tablecloth, and jerked it forward. The linguini spilled backward into the dark-haired man's lap. The man jerked away as this occurred and his glasses fell askew, revealing a pair of glittering, faceted eyes.

"Prick!" he announced, his hands shooting forward, paralleling the other's clublike appendage.

"Son of a bitch!" the giant bellowed, jerking his hand away. "You fuckin' burned me!"

"'Fuckin' shocked,'" the other corrected. "Lucky I didn't fry you! What is this? Why you taking my table apart?"

"You're hirin' fuckin' aces, ain't you? I wanted you to see my shit."

"I'm not hiring aces. I thought you were, the way you came on."

"Hell, no! Bug-eyed bastard!"

The other moved quickly to adjust his glasses.

"It's a real pain," he stated, "looking at two hundred sixteen views of an asshole."

"I'll give you something up the asshole!" said the giant, raising his hand again.

"You got it," said the other, an electrical storm erupting suddenly between his palms. The giant stepped back a pace. Then the storm passed and the man lowered his hands. "If it weren't for the linguini in my lap," he said then, "this would be funny. Sit down. We can wait together."

"Funny?"

"Think about it while I go clean up," he replied. Then, "Name's Croyd," he said.

"Croyd Crenson?"

"Yeah. And you're Bludgeon, aren't you?"

"Yeah. What do you mean 'funny'?"

"Like mistaken identity," Croyd answered. "Two guys thinking they're each somebody else, you know?"

Bludgeon's brow was furrowed for several seconds before his lips formed a tentative smile. Then he laughed, four coughlike barks. "Yeah, fuckin' funny!" he said then, and barked again.

Bludgeon slid into the booth, still chuckling, as Croyd slid out. Croyd headed back toward the men's room and Bludgeon ordered a pitcher of beer from the waiter who came by to clean up. A few moments later, a black-suited man entered the dining area from the kitchen and stood, thumbs hooked behind his belt, toothpick moving slowly within a faint frown. Then he advanced.

"You look a little familiar," he said, coming up beside the booth.

"I'm Bludgeon," the other replied, raising his hand.

"Chris Mazzucchelli. Yeah, I've heard of you. I hear you can bash your way through nearly anything with that mitt of yours."

Bludgeon grinned. "Fuckin' A," he said.

Mazzucchelli smiled around the toothpick and nodded. He slid into Croyd's seat.

"You know who I am?" he asked.

"Hell, yes," Bludgeon said, nodding. "You're the Man."

“That I am. I guess you heard there’s some trouble coming down, and I need some special kind of soldiers.”

“You need some fuckin’ heads broke, I’m fuckin’ good at it,” Bludgeon told him.

“That’s nicely put,” Mazzucchelli said, reaching inside his jacket. He removed an envelope and tossed it onto the tabletop. “Retainer.”

Bludgeon picked it up, tore it open, then counted the bills slowly, moving his lips. When he was finished, he said, “Fuckin’ price is fuckin’ right. Now what?”

“There’s an address in there too. You go to it eight o’clock tonight and get some orders. Okay?”

Bludgeon put away the envelope and rose.

“Damn straight,” he agreed, reaching out and picking up the pitcher of beer, raising it, draining it, and belching.

“Who’s the other guy—the one back in the john?”

“Shit, he’s one of us,” Bludgeon replied. “Name’s Croyd Crenson. Bad man to fuck with, but he’s got a great sense of humor.”

Mazzucchelli nodded. “Have a good day,” he said.

Bludgeon belched again, nodded back, waved his club-hand, and departed.

* * *

Croyd hesitated only a moment on reentering the dining room and regarding Mazzucchelli in his seat. He advanced, raised two fingers in mock salute, and said, “I’m Croyd,” as he drew near. “Are you the recruiter?”

Mazzucchelli looked him up and looked him down, eyes dwelling for a moment on the large wet spot at the front of his trousers.

“Something scare you?” he asked.

“Yeah, I saw the kitchen,” Croyd replied. “You looking for talent?”

“What kind of talent you got?”

Croyd reached for a small lamp on a nearby table. He unscrewed the bulb and held it before him. Shortly it began to glow. Then it brightened, flared, and went out.

“Oops,” he observed. “Gave it a little too much juice.”

“For a buck and a half,” Mazzucchelli stated, “I can buy a flashlight.”

“You got no imagination,” Croyd said. “I can do some heavy stuff with burglar alarms, computers, telephones—not to mention anybody I shake hands with. But if you’re not interested, I won’t starve.”

He began to turn away.

"Sit down, sit down!" Mazzucchelli said. "I heard you had a sense of humor. Sure, I like that stuff, and I think maybe I can use you in a certain matter. I need some good people in a hurry."

"Something scare you?" Croyd asked, sliding into the seat recently vacated by Bludgeon.

Mazzucchelli scowled and Croyd grinned.

"Humor," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Crenson," the other stated, "that's your last name. See, I do know you. I know a lot about you. I've been stringing you along. That's humor. I know you're pretty good, and you usually deliver what you promise. But we got some things to talk about before we talk about other things. You know what I mean?"

"No," Croyd answered. "But I'm willing to learn."

"You want anything while we're talking?"

"I'd like to try the linguini again," Croyd said, "and another bottle of Chianti."

Mazzucchelli raised his hand, snapped his fingers. A waiter rushed into the room.

"*Linguini, e una bottiglia,*" he said. "*Chianti.*"

The man hurried off. Croyd rubbed his hands together, to the accompaniment of a faint crackling sound.

"The one who just left…," Mazzucchelli said at length. "Bludgeon…"

"Yes?" Croyd said, after an appropriate wait.

"He'll make a good soldier," Mazzucchelli finished.

Croyd nodded. "I suppose so."

"But you, you have some skills besides what the virus gave you. I understand you are a pretty good second-story man. You knew old Bentley."

Croyd nodded again. "He was my teacher. I knew him back when he was a dog. You seem to know more about me than most people do."

Mazzucchelli removed his toothpick, sipped his beer. "That's my business," he said after a time, "knowing things. That's why I don't want to send you off to be a soldier."

The waiter returned with a plate of linguini, a glass, and a bottle, which he proceeded to uncork. He passed Croyd a setting from the next booth. Croyd immediately began to eat with a certain manic gusto that Mazzucchelli found vaguely unsettling.

Croyd paused long enough to ask, "So what is it you've got in mind for me?"

"Something a little more subtle, if you're the right man for it."

"Subtle. I'm right for subtle," Croyd said.

Mazzucchelli raised a finger. "First," he said, "one of those things we talk about before we talk about other things."

Observing the speed with which Croyd's plate was growing empty, he snapped his fingers again and the waiter rushed in with another load of linguini.

"What thing?" Croyd asked, pushing aside the first plate as the second slid into place before him.

Mazzucchelli laid his hand on Croyd's left arm in an almost fatherly fashion and leaned forward. "I understand you got problems," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I have heard that you are into speed," Mazzucchelli observed, "and that every now and then you become a raging maniac, killing people, destroying property and wreaking general havoc until you run out of steam or some ace who knows you takes pity and puts you down for the count."

Croyd laid his fork aside and quaffed a glass of wine.

"This is true," he said, "though it is not something I enjoy talking about."

Mazzucchelli shrugged. "Everybody has the right to a little fun every now and then," he stated. "I ask only for business reasons. I would not like to have you act this way if you were working for me on something sensitive."

"The behavior of which you've heard is not an indulgence," Croyd explained. "It becomes something of a necessity, though, after I've been awake a certain period of time."

"Uh—you anywhere near that point yet?"

"Nowhere near," Croyd replied. "There's nothing to worry about for a long while."

"If I was to hire you, I'd rather I didn't worry about it at all. Now, it's no good asking somebody not to be a user. But I want to know this: Have you got enough sense when you start on the speed that you can take yourself off of my work? Then go crash and burn someplace not connected with what you're doing for me?"

Croyd studied him for a moment, then nodded slowly. "I see what you mean," he said. "If that's what the job calls for, sure, I can do it. No problem."

"With that understanding, I want to hire you. It's a little more subtle than breaking heads, though. And it isn't any sort of simple burglary either."

"I've done lots of odd things," Croyd said, "and lots of subtle things. Some of them have even been legal."

They both smiled.

"For this one, it may well be that you see no violence," Mazzucchelli said. "Like I told you, my business is knowing things. I want you to get me some information. The best way to get it is so that nobody even knows it's been got. On the other hand, if the only way you can get it is to cause somebody considerable angst, that's okay. So long as you clean up real good afterwards."

"I get the picture. What do you want to know, and where do I find it?"

Mazzucchelli gave a short, barking laugh.

"There seems to be another company doing business in this town," he said then. "You know what I mean?"

"Yes," Croyd replied, "and there is not usually room on one block for two delicatessens."

"Exactly," Mazzucchelli answered.

"So you are taking on extra help to continue the competition by heavier means."

"That is a good summary. Now, like I said, there is certain information I need about the other company. I will pay you well to get it for me."

Croyd nodded. "I'm willing to give it a shot. What particular information are you after?"

Mazzucchelli leaned forward and lowered his voice, his lips barely moving. "The chairman of the board. I want to know who's running the show."

"The boss? You mean he didn't even send you a dead fish in somebody's pants? I thought it was customary to observe certain amenities in these matters?"

Mazzucchelli shrugged. "These guys got no etiquette. Could be a bunch of foreigners."

"Have you got any leads at all, or do I go it cold?"

"You will be pretty much a ground-breaker. I will give you a list of places they sometimes seem to operate through. I also have names of a couple people who might do some work for them."

"Why didn't you just pick one of them up and pop the question?"

"I think that, like you, they are independent contractors rather than family members."

"I see."

Then, "And that may not be all they have in common with you," Mazzucchelli added.

"Aces?" Croyd asked.

Mazzucchelli nodded.

"If I've got to mess with aces it's going to cost more than if they're just civilians."

"I'm good for it," Mazzucchelli said, withdrawing another envelope from his inner pocket. "Here is a retainer and the list. You may consider the retainer ten percent of the total price for the job."

Croyd opened the envelope, counted quickly. He smiled when he finished.

"Where do you take delivery?" he asked.

"The manager here can always get in touch with me."

"What's his name?"

"Theotocopoulos. Theo'll do."

"Okay," Croyd said. "You just hired subtlety."

"When you go to sleep you turn into a different person, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, if that happens before the job is done, that new guy's still got a contract with me."

"So long as he gets paid."

"We understand each other."

They shook hands, Croyd rose, left the booth, crossed the room. Moth-sized snowflakes swirled in as he departed. Mazzucchelli reached for a fresh toothpick. Outside, Croyd tossed a black pill into his mouth.

❖ ❖ ❖

Wearing gray slacks, blue blazer, and bloodclot-colored tie, his hair marcelled, shades silver, nails manicured, Croyd sat alone at a small window table in Aces High, regarding the city's lights through wind-whipped snow beyond his baked salmon, sipping Chateau d'Yquem, hashing over plans for the next move in his investigation and flirting with Jane Dow, who had passed his way twice so far and was even now approaching again—a thing he took to be more than coincidence and a good omen, having lusted after her in a variety of hearts (some of them multiples) on a number of occasions—and hoping he might fit the occasion to the feelings, he raised his hand as she drew near and touched her arm.

A tiny spark crackled, she halted, said, "Yike!" and reached to rub the place where the shock had occurred.

"Sorry—" Croyd began.

"Must be static electricity," she said.

"Must be," he agreed. "All I wanted to say was that you do know me, even though you wouldn't recognize me in this incarnation. I'm Croyd Crenson. We've met in passing, here and there, and I always wanted just to sit and talk a spell, but somehow our paths never crossed long enough at the right time."

"That's an interesting line," she said, running a finger across her damp brow, "naming the one ace nobody's certain about. I bet a lot of groupies get picked up that way."

"True," Croyd replied, smiling, as he opened his arms wide. "But I can prove it if you'll wait about half a minute."

"Why? What are you doing?"

"Filling the air with neg-ions for you," he said, "for that delightfully stimulating before-the-storm feeling. Just a hint at the great time I could show—"

"Cut it out!" She began backing away. "It sometimes triggers—"

Croyd's hands were wet, his face was wet, his hair collapsed and leaked onto his forehead.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What the hell," he said, "let's make it a thunderstorm," and lightning danced among his fingertips. He began laughing.

Other diners glanced in their direction.

"Stop," she said. "Please."

"Sit down for a minute and I will."

"Okay."

She took the seat opposite him. He dried his face and hands on his napkin.

"I'm sorry," he said. "My fault. I should be careful with storm effects around someone they call Water Lily."

She smiled.

"Your glasses are all wet," she said, suddenly reaching forward and plucking them from his face. "I'll clean—"

"Two hundred sixteen views of moist loveliness," he stated as she stared. "The virus has, as usual, overendowed me in several respects."

"You really see that many of me?"

He nodded. "These joker aspects sometimes crop up in my changes. Hope I haven't turned you off."

"They're rather—magnificent," she said.

"You're very kind. Now give back the glasses."

"A moment."

She wiped the lenses on the corner of the tablecloth, then passed them to him.

"Thanks." He donned them again. "Buy you a drink? Dinner? A water spaniel?"

"I'm on duty," she said. "Thanks. Sorry. Maybe another time."

"Well, I'm working now myself. But if you're serious, I'll give you a couple of phone numbers and an address. I may not be at any of them. But I get messages."

"Give them to me," she said, and he scribbled quickly in a notepad, tore out the page, and passed it to her. "What kind of work?" she asked.

"Subtle investigation," he said. "It involves a gang war."

"Really? I've heard people say you're kind of honest, as well as kind of crazy."

"They're half-right," he said. "So give me a call or stop by. I'll rent scuba gear and show you a good time."

She smiled and began to rise. "Maybe I will."

He withdrew an envelope from his pocket, opened it, pushed aside a wad of bills, and removed a slip of paper with some writing on it.

"Uh, before you go—does the name James Spector mean anything to you?"

She froze and grew pale. Croyd found himself wet once again.

"What did I say?" he asked.

"You're not kidding? You really don't know?"

"Nope. Not kidding."

"You know the aces jingle."

"Parts of it."

" 'Golden Boy ain't got no joy,' " she recited. " 'If it's Demise, don't look in his eyes…'—that's him: James Spector is Demise's real name."

"I never knew that," he said. Then, "I never heard any verses about me."

"I don't remember any either."

"Come on. I always wondered."

" 'Sleeper waking, meals taking,' " she said slowly. " 'Sleeper speeding, people bleeding.' "

"Oh."

"If I call you and you're that far along…"

"If I'm that far along, I don't return calls."

"I'll get you a couple of dry napkins," she offered. "Sorry about the storms."

"Don't be. Did anyone ever tell you you're lovely when you exude moisture?"

She stared at him. Then, "I'll get you a dry fish too," she said.

Croyd raised his hand to blow her a kiss and gave himself a shock.

II

Checking to see that no one was watching, Croyd dropped a pair of Black Beauties with his espresso. He cursed softly as a part of the sigh that followed. This was not working out as he had anticipated. All of the leads he had tried during the past days had pretty much fizzled, and he was further along into the speed than he cared to be. Ordinarily this would not bother him, but for the first time he had made two separate promises concerning drugs and his actions. One being business and one being personal, he reflected, they kind of caught him coming and going. He would definitely have to keep an eye, or at least a few facets, on himself so as not to mess up on this job, and he didn't want to turn Water Lily off on their first date. Usually, though, he could feel the paranoia coming on, and he decided to let that be his indicator as to his degree of irrationality this time around.

He had run all over town, trying to trace two leads who seemed to have vanished. He had checked out every possible front on his list, satisfying himself that they had only been randomly chosen rendezvous points. Next was James Spector. While he hadn't recognized the name, he did know Demise. He had met him, briefly, on a number of occasions. The man had always impressed him as one of the sleazier aces. "If it's Demise, don't look in his eyes," he hummed as he signaled to a waiter.

"Yes, sir?"

"More espresso, and bring me a bigger cup for it, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"For that matter, bring me a whole pot."

"All right."

He hummed a little more loudly and began tapping his foot. "Demise eyes. The eyes of Demise," he intoned. He jumped when the waiter placed a cup before him.

"Don't sneak up on me like that!"

"Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you."

The man began to fill the cup.

"Don't stand behind me while you're pouring. Stand off to the side where I can see you."

"Sure."

The waiter moved off to Croyd's right. He left the carafe on the table when he departed.

As he drank cup after cup of coffee, Croyd began thinking thoughts he had not thought in a long while, concerning sleep, mortality, transfiguration. After a time he called for another carafe. It was definitely a two-carafe problem.

❖ ❖ ❖

The evening's snowfall had ceased, but the inch or so that lay upon the sidewalks sparkled under the streetlamps, and a wind so cold it burned whipped glittering eddies along Tenth Street. Walking carefully, the tall, thin man in the heavy black overcoat glanced back once as he turned the corner, breath pluming. Ever since he'd left the package store he'd had a feeling that he was being watched. And there was a figure, a hundred yards or so back, moving along the opposite side of the street at about the same pace as himself. James Spector felt that it might be worth waiting for the man and killing him just to avoid any possible hassle farther along the way. After all, there were two fifths of Jack Daniel's and a six-pack of Schlitz in his bag, and if someone were to accost him abruptly on these icy walks— He winced at the thought of the bottles breaking, of having to retrace his path to the store.

On the other hand, waiting for the man and killing him right here, while holding the package, could also result in his slipping— even if it was only when he leaned forward to go through the man's pockets. It would be better to find a place to set things down first. He looked about.

There were some steps leading up to a doorway, farther along. He headed for them and set his parcel down on the third one, against its iron railing. He brushed off his collar and turned it up, fished a package of cigarettes from his pocket, shook one out, and lit it within cupped hands. He leaned against the rail then and waited, watching the corner.

Shortly a man in gray slacks and a blue blazer came into sight, necktie whipping in the wind, dark hair disheveled. He paused and stared, then nodded and advanced. As he came nearer, Spector realized that the man was wearing mirrorshades. He felt a sudden jab of panic, seeing that the other possessed an adequate first line of defense against him. It wasn't likely to be an accident either, in the middle of the night. Therefore, this was more than some strong-arm hood on his tail. He took a long drag on his cigarette, then mounted several steps backward, slowly, gaining sufficient height for a good kick at the other's head, to knock the damned things off.

"Yo, Demise!" the man called. "I need to talk to you!"

Demise stared, trying to place him. But there was nothing familiar about the man, not even his voice.

The man came up and stood before him, smiling. "I just need a minute or two of your time," he said. "It's important. I'm in a big hurry and I'm trying for a certain measure of subtlety. It isn't easy."

"Do I know you?" Demise asked him.

"We've met. In other lives, so to speak. My lives, that is. Also, I believe you might once have done some accounting for my brother-in-law's company, over in Jersey. Croyd's the name."

"What do you want?"

"I need the name of the head of the new mob that's trying to take over operations from the kindly old Mafia, which has run this town for half a century or so."

"You're kidding," Demise said, taking a final drag on his cigarette, dropping it and moving his toe to grind it.

"No," said Croyd. "I definitely require this information so I can rest in peace. I understand you've done some work other than bookkeeping for these guys. So tell me who runs the show and I'll be moving along."

"I can't do that," Demise answered.

"As I said, I'm aiming for subtlety. So I'd rather not work this the hard way—"

Demise kicked him in the face. Croyd's glasses flew over his shoulder, and Demise found himself staring into 216 glittering eye-facets. He was unable to lock gazes with the points of light.

"You're an ace," he said, "or a joker."

"I'm the Sleeper," Croyd told him as he reached out and took hold of Demise's right arm, then broke it across the railing. "You should have let me be subtle. It doesn't hurt as much."

Demise shrugged even as he winced. "Go ahead and break the other one too. But I can't tell you what I don't know."

Croyd stared at the arm hanging at Demise's side. Demise reached across and caught hold of it, twisted it into place, held it.

"You heal real fast, don't you?" Croyd said. "In minutes, even. I remember now."

"That's right."

"Can you grow a new arm if I tear one off?"

"I don't know, and I'd rather not find out. Look, I've heard you're a psycho and I believe it. I'd tell you if I knew. I don't enjoy regenerating. But all I did was a lousy contract hit. I've got no idea who's on top."

Croyd reached out with both hands, catching hold of Demise's wrists.

"Breaking you up may not do much good," he observed, "but there's still room for subtlety. Ever have any electroshock therapy? Try this."

When Demise stopped jerking, Croyd released his wrists. When he could speak again, Demise said, "I still can't tell you. I don't know."

"So let's lose a few more neurons," Croyd suggested.

"Cool it a minute," Demise said. "I never learned the names of any of the big guys. Never meant dick to me. Still don't. All I know is this guy named Eye—a joker. He just has one big eye and he wears a monocle in it. He met me once, in Times Square, gave me a hit and paid me. That's all that matters. You know how it is. You freelance yourself."

Croyd sighed. "Eye? Seems I've heard of him someplace or other. Where can I get hold of the guy?"

"I understand he hangs around Club Dead Nicholas. Plays cards there awhile on Friday nights. Kept meaning to go by and kill the fucker, but I never got around to it. Cost me a foot."

" 'Club Dead Nicholas'?" Croyd said. "I don't believe I know that one."

"Used to be Nicholas King's Mortuary, near Jokertown. Serves food and booze, has music and a dance floor, gambling in a back room. Just opened recently. Kind of Halloween motif. Too morbid for my taste."

"Okay," Croyd said. "I hope you're not bullshitting me, Demise."

"That's all I got."

Croyd nodded slowly. "It'll do." He released the other and backed away. "Maybe then I can rest," he said. "Subtle. Real subtle." He picked up Demise's package and put it in his arms. "Here. Don't forget your stuff. Better watch your step too. It's getting slippery." He continued to back away, muttering to himself, up the street, to the corner. Then he turned again and was gone.

Sinking to a seated position on the stoop, Demise cracked open a fifth and took a long swallow.

III

The wind came and went like heavy surf, vibrating streetside windowpanes, driving icy pellets against the stone lions flanking the entranceway. These sounds were intensified as the door to the Jokertown Clinic was opened. A man entered and began stamping his feet and brushing snow from his dark blue blazer. He made no effort to close the door behind him.

Madeleine Johnson, sometimes known as the Chickenfoot Lady, doing a partial front desk deathwatch for her friend Cock Robin, with whom she had a good thing going, looked up from her crossword puzzle, stroked her wattles with her pencil, and squawked, "Close the damn door, mister!"

The man lowered the handkerchief with which he had been wiping his face and stared at her. She realized then that his eyes were faceted. His jaw muscles bunched and unbunched.

"Sorry," he said, and he drew the door closed. Then he turned his head slowly, seeming to study everything in the room, though with those eyes it was difficult to tell for certain. Finally "I've got to talk to Dr. Tachyon," he said.

"The doctor is out of town," she stated, "and he's going to be away for some time. What is it that you want?"

"I want to be put to sleep," he said.

"This isn't a veterinary clinic," she told him, and regretted it a moment later when he moved forward, for he developed a distinct halo and began emitting sparks like a static electricity generator. She doubted this had much to do with virtue, for his teeth were bared and he clenched and unclenched his hands as if anticipating strenuous activity.

"This—is—an—emergency," he said. "My name is Croyd Crenson, and there is probably a file. Better find it. I get violent."

She squawked again, leaped and departed, leaving two pinfeathers to drift in the air before him. He put out a hand and leaned upon her desk, then mopped his brow again. His gaze fell upon a half-filled coffee cup beside her newspaper. He picked it up and chugged it.

Moments later there came a clattering sound from the hallway beyond the desk. A blond, blue-eyed young man halted at the threshold and stared at him. He had on a green and white polo shirt, a stethoscope and a beach-boy smile. From the waist down he was a palomino pony, his tail beautifully braided. Madeleine appeared behind him and fluttered.

"He's the one," she told the centaur. "He said, 'violent.' "

Still smiling, the quadripedal youth entered the room and extended his hand. “I’m Dr. Finn,” he said. “I’ve sent for your file, Mr. Crenson. Come on back to an examination room, and you can tell me what’s bothering you while we wait for it.”

Croyd took his hand and nodded.

“Any coffee back there?”

“I think so. We’ll get you a cup.”

* * *

Croyd paced the small room, swilling coffee, as Dr. Finn read over his case history, snorting on several occasions and at one point making a noise amazingly like a whinny.

“I didn’t realize you were the Sleeper,” he said finally, closing the file and looking at his patient. “Some of this material has made the textbooks.” He tapped the folder with a well-manicured finger.

“So I’ve heard,” Croyd replied.

“Obviously you have a problem you just can’t wait for your next cycle to clear up,” Dr. Finn observed. “What is it?’

Croyd managed a bleak smile. “It’s the matter of getting on with the crapshoot, of actually going to sleep.”

“What’s the problem?”

“I don’t know how much of this is in the file,” Croyd told him, “but I’ve a terrible fear of going to sleep—”

“Yes, there is something about your paranoia. Perhaps some counseling—”

Croyd punched a hole in the wall.

“It’s not paranoia,” he said, “not if the danger is real. I could die during my next hibernation. I could wake up as the most disgusting joker you can imagine, with a normal sleep-cycle. Then I’d be stuck that way. It’s only paranoia if the fear is groundless, isn’t it?”

“Well,” Dr. Finn said, “I suppose we could call it that if the fear is a really big thing, even if it is justified. I don’t know. I’m not a psychiatrist. But I also saw in the file that you tend to take amphetamines to keep from falling asleep for as long as you can. You must know that that’s going to add a big chemical boost to whatever paranoia is already present.”

Croyd was running his finger around the inside of the hole he had punched in the wall, rubbing away loose pieces of plaster.

“But of course a part of this is semantics,” Dr. Finn went on. “It doesn’t matter what we call it. Basically you’re afraid to go to sleep. This time, though, you feel that you should?”

Croyd began cracking his knuckles as he paced. Fascinated, Dr. Finn counted each cracking noise. When the seventh popping sound occurred, he began to wonder what Croyd would do when he was out of knuckles.

"Eight, nine, ten..." he subvocalized.

Croyd punched another hole in the wall.

"Uh, would you like some more coffee?" Dr. Finn asked him.

"Yes, about a gallon."

Dr. Finn was gone, as if a starting gate had opened.

* * *

Later, not telling Croyd it was decaf he was guzzling, Dr. Finn continued, "I'm afraid to give you any more drugs on top of all the amphetamines you've taken."

"I've made two promises," Croyd said, "that I'd try sleeping this time, that I wouldn't resist. But if you can't knock me out fast, I'll probably leave rather than put up with all this anxiety. If that happens, I know I'll be back on bennies and dexes fast. So hit me with a narcotic. I'm willing to take my chances."

Dr. Finn shook his mane. "I'd rather try something simpler and a lot safer first. What say we do a little brain wave entrainment and suggestion?"

"I'm not familiar with the procedure," Croyd said.

"It's not traumatic. The Russians have been experimenting it for years. I'll just clip these little soft pads to yours," he said, swabbing the lobes with something moist, and we'll pulse a low amp current through your head—say, four hertz. You won't even feel it."

He adjusted a control on the box from which the leads emerged.

"Now what?" Croyd asked.

"Close your eyes and rest for just a minute. You may notice a kind of drifting feeling."

"Yeah."

"But there's heaviness, too, within it. Your arms are heavy and your legs are heavy."

"They're heavy," Croyd acknowledged.

"It will be hard to think of anything in particular. Your mind will just go on drifting."

"I'm drifting," Croyd agreed.

"And it should feel very good. Probably better than you've felt all day, finally getting a chance to rest. Breathe slowly and let go in all the tight places. You're almost there already. This is great."

Croyd said something, but it was muttered, indistinguishable.

"You are doing very well. You're quite good at this. Usually I count backward from ten. For you, though, we can start at eight, since you're almost asleep already. Eight. You are far away and it feels fine. Nine. You are already asleep, but now you are going into it even more deeply. Ten. You will sleep soundly, without fear or pain. Sleep."

Croyd began to snore.

There were no spare beds, but since Croyd had stiffened to mannequinlike rigidity before turning bright green, his respiration and heartbeat slowing to something between that of a hibernating bear and a dead one, Dr. Finn had had him placed, erect, at the rear of a broom closet, where he did not take up much space, and he drove a nail into the door and hung the chart on it, after having entered, "Patient extremely suggestible."

IV

When Croyd awoke, he pushed aside mop handles, stepped into a bucket, and fell forward. The closet's door offered small resistance to the wild, forward thrust of his hands. As it sprang open and he sprawled, the light stabbing painfully into his eyes, he began to recall the circumstances preceding his repose: the centaur-doctor—Finn—and that funny sleep-machine, yes… And another little death would mean another sleep-change.

Lying in the hallway, he counted his fingers. There were ten of them all right, but his skin was dead white. He shook off the bucket, climbed to his feet, and stumbled again. His left arm shot downward, touched the floor, and pushed against it. This impelled him to his feet and over backward. He executed an aerial somersault to his rear, landed on his feet, and toppled rearward again. His hands dropped toward the floor to catch himself, then he withdrew them without making contact and simply let himself fall. Years of experience had already given him a suspicion as to what new factor had entered his life-situation. His overcompensations were telling him something about his reflexes.

When he rose again, his movements were very slow, but they grew more and more normal as he explored. By the time he located a washroom all traces of excessive speed or slowness had vanished. When he studied himself in the mirror, he discovered that, in addition to having grown taller and thinner, it was now a pink-eyed countenance that he regarded, a shock of white hair above the high, glacial brow. He massaged his temples, licked his lips, and shrugged. He was familiar with albinism. It was not the first time he had come up short in the pigment department.

He sought his mirrorshades then recalled that Demise had kicked them off. No matter. He'd pick up another pair along with some sun block. Perhaps he'd better dye the hair too, he decided. Less conspicuous that way.

Whatever, his stomach was signaling its emptiness in a frantic fashion. No time for paperwork, for checking out properly—if, indeed, he'd been checked in properly. He was not at all certain that was the case. Best simply to avoid everyone if he didn't want to be delayed on the road to food. He could stop by and thank Finn another time.

Moving as Bentley had taught him long ago, all of his senses extended fully, he began his exit.

❖ ❖ ❖

"Hi, Jube. One of each, as usual."

Jube studied the tall, cadaverous figure before him, meeting diminished images of his own tusked, blubbery countenance in the mirrorshades that masked the man's eyes.

"Croyd? That you, fella?"

"Yep. Just up and around. I crashed at Tachyon's clinic this time."

"That must be why I hadn't heard any Croyd Crenson disaster stories lately. You actually went gentle into your last good night?"

Croyd nodded, studying headlines. "You might put it that way," he said. "Unusual circumstances. Funny feeling. Hey! What's this?' He raised a newspaper and studied it. "'Bloodbath at Werewolf Clubhouse.' What's going on, a fucking gang war?"

"A fucking gang war," Jube acknowledged.

"Damn! I've got to get back on the stick fast."

"What stick?"

"Metaphorical stick," Croyd replied. "If this is Friday, it must be Dead Nicholas."

"You okay, boy?"

"No, but twenty or thirty thousand calories will be a step in the right direction."

"Ought to take the edge off," Jube agreed. "Hear who won the Miss Jokertown Beauty Pageant last week?"

"Who?" Croyd asked.

"Nobody."

* * *

Croyd entered Club Dead Nicholas to the notes of an organ playing "Wolverine Blues." The windows were draped in black, the tables were coffins, the waiters wore shrouds. The wall to the crematorium had been removed; it was now an open grill tended by demonic jokers. As Croyd moved into the lounge, he saw that the casket-tables were open beneath sheets of heavy glass; ghoulish figures—presumably of wax—were laid out within them in various states of unrest.

A lipless, noseless, earless joker as pale as himself approached Croyd immediately, laying a bony hand upon his arm.

"Pardon me, sir. May I see your membership card?" he asked.

Croyd handed him a fifty-dollar bill.

"Yes, of course," said the grim waiter. "I'll bring the card to your table. Along with a complimentary drink. I take it you will be dining here?"

"Yes. And I've heard you have some good card games."

"Back room. It's customary to get another player to introduce you."

"Sure. Actually, I'm waiting for someone who should be stopping by this evening to play. Fellow name of Eye. Is he here yet?"

"No. Mr. Eye was eaten. Partly, that is. By an alligator. Last September. In the sewers. Sorry."

"Ouch," Croyd said. "I didn't see him often. But when I did he usually had a little business for me."

The waiter studied him. "What did you say your name was?"

"Whiteout."

"I don't want to know your business," the man said. "But there is a fellow named Melt, who Eye used to hang around with. Maybe he can help you, maybe he can't. You want to wait and talk to him, I'll send him over when he comes in."

"All right. I'll eat while I'm waiting."

Sipping his comp beer, waiting for a pair of steaks, Croyd withdrew a deck of Bicycle playing cards from his side pocket, shuffled it, dealt one facedown and another faceup beside it. The ten of diamonds faced him on the clear tabletop, above the agonized grimace of the fanged lady, a wooden stake through her heart, a few drops of red beside the grimace. Croyd turned over the hole card, which proved a seven of clubs. He flipped it back over, glanced about him, turned it again. Now it was a jack of spades keeping the ten company. The flicker-frequency-switch was a trick he'd practiced for laughs the last time his reflexes had been hyped-up. It had come back almost immediately when he'd tried to recall it, leading him to speculate as to what other actions lay buried in his prefrontal gyrus. Wing-flapping reflexes? Throat contractions for ultrasonic wails? Coordination patterns for extra appendages?

He shrugged and dealt himself poker hands just good enough to beat those he gave the staked lady till his food came.

Along about his third dessert the pallid waiter approached, escorting a tall, bald individual whose flesh seemed to flow like wax down a candlestick. His features were constantly distorted as tumorlike lumps passed beneath his skin.

"You told me, sir, that you wanted to meet Melt," the waiter said.

Croyd rose and extended his hand.

"Call me Whiteout," he said. "Have a seat. Let me buy you a drink."

"If you're selling something, forget it," Melt told him.

Croyd shook his head as the waiter drifted away.

"I've heard they have good card games here, but I've got nobody to introduce me," Croyd stated.

Melt narrowed his eyes.

"Oh, you play cards."

Croyd smiled. "I sometimes get lucky,"

"Really? And you knew Eye?"

"Well enough to play cards with him."

"That all?"

"You might check with Demise," Croyd said. "We're in a similar line of work. We're both ex-accountants who moved on to bigger things. My name says it all."

Melt glanced hastily about, then seated himself. "Let's keep that kind of noise down, okay? You looking for work now?"

"Not really, not now. I just want to play a little cards."

Melt licked his lips as a bulge ran down his left cheek, passed over his jawline, distended his neck.

"You got a lot of green to throw around?"

"Enough."

"Okay, I'll get you into the game," Melt said. "I'd like to take some of it away from you."

Croyd smiled, paid his check, and followed Melt into the back room, where the casket gaming table was closed and had a nonreflective surface. There were seven of them in the game to begin with, and three went broke before midnight. Croyd and Melt and Bug Pimp and Runner saw piles of cash grow and shrink before them till three in the A.M. Then Runner yawned, stretched, and turned out a small bottle of pills from an inside pocket.

"Anybody need something to keep awake?" he asked.

"I'll stick with coffee," Melt said.

"Gimme," said Bug Pimp.

"Never touch the stuff," said Croyd.

A half hour later Bug Pimp folded and made noises about checking on the line of joker femmes he hustled to straights wanting jittery jollies. By four o'clock the Runner was broke and had to walk. Croyd and Melt stared at each other.

"We're both ahead," said Melt.

"True."

"Should we take the money and run?"

Croyd smiled.

"I feel the same way," Melt said. "Deal."

As sunrise tickled the stained glass window and the dusty mechanical bats followed the hologram ghosts to their rest, Melt massaged his temples, rubbed his eyes, and said, "Will you take my marker?"

"Nope," Croyd replied.

"You shouldn't have let me play that last hand then."

"You didn't tell me you were that broke. I thought you could write a check."

"Well, shit. I ain't got it. What do you want to do?"

"Take something else, I guess."

"Like what?"

"A name."

"Whose name?" Melt asked, reaching inside his jacket and scratching his chest.

"The person who gives you your orders."

"What orders?"

"The ones you pass on to guys like Demise."

"You're kidding. It'd be my ass to name a name like that."

"It'll be your ass if you don't," Croyd said.

Melt's hand came out from behind his coat holding a .32, automatic, which he leveled at Croyd's chest. "I'm not scared of two-bit muscle. There's dumdum slugs in here. Know what they do?"

Suddenly Melt's hand was empty and blood began to ooze from around the nail of his trigger finger. Croyd slowly twisted the automatic out of shape before he tore out the clip and ejected a round.

"You're right, they're dumdums," he acknowledged. "Look at the little flat-nosed buggers, will you? By the way, my name's not White-out. I'm Croyd Crenson, the Sleeper, and nobody welshes on me. Maybe you've heard I'm a little bit nuts. You give me the name and you don't find out how true that is."

Melt licked his lips. The lumps beneath his glistening skin increased the tempo of their passage.

"I'm dead if they ever hear."

Croyd shrugged. "I won't tell them if you won't." He pushed a stack of bills toward Melt. "Here's your cut for getting me into the game. Give me the name, take it and walk, or I'll leave you in three of these boxes." Croyd kicked the coffin.

"Danny Mao," Melt whispered, "at the Twisted Dragon, over near Chinatown."

"He gives you a hit list, pays you?"

"Right."

"Who pulls his strings?"

"Beats the shit out of me. He's all I know."

"When's he at the Twisted Dragon?"

"I think he hangs out there a lot, because other people in the place seem to know him. I'd get a call, I'd go over. I'd check my coat. We'd have dinner, or a few drinks. Business didn't get mentioned. But when I'd leave, there'd be a piece of paper in my pocket with a name or two or three on it, and an envelope with money in it. Same as with Eye. That's how he worked it."

"The first time?"

"The first time we took a long walk and he explained the setup. After that, it was like I just said."

"That's it?"

"That's all."

"Okay, you're off the hook."

Melt picked up his stack of bills and stuffed it into his pocket. He opened his distorted mouth as if to say something, thought better of it, thought again, said, "Let's not leave together."

"Fine with me. G'bye."

Melt moved toward the side door, flanked by a pair of tombstones. Croyd picked up his winnings and began thinking about breakfast.

❖ ❖ ❖

Croyd rode the elevator to Aces High, regretting the absence of a power of flight on such a perfect spring evening. Arriving, he stepped into the lounge, paused, and glanced about.

Six tables held twelve couples, and a dark-haired lady in a low-cut silver blouse sat alone at a two-person table near the bar, twirling a swizzle in some exotic drink. Three men and a woman were seated at the bar. Soft modern jazz sounds circulated through the cool air, accompaniment to blender and laughter, to the clicks and splashes of ice, liquid, and glass. Croyd moved forward.

"Is Hiram here?" he asked the bartender.

The man looked at him, then shook his head.

"Are you expecting him this evening?"

A shrug. "Hasn't been around much lately."

"What about Jane Dow?"

The man studied him. Then, "She's taken off too," he stated.

"So you really don't know if either of them'll be in?"

"Nope."

Croyd nodded. "I'm Croyd Crenson and I plan to eat here tonight. If Jane comes in, I'd like to know."

"Your best bet's to leave a note at the reservation desk before you're seated."

"Got something I can write on?" Croyd asked.

The bartender reached beneath the bar, brought up a pad and a pencil and passed them to him. Croyd scribbled a message.

As he set the pad down, his hand was covered by a more delicate one, of darker complexion, with bright red nails. His gaze moved along it to the shoulder, skipped to the silver décolletage, paused a beat, rose. It was the solitary lady with the exotic drink. On closer inspection there was something familiar…

"Croyd?" she said softly. "You get stood up too?"

As he met her dark-eyed gaze a name drifted up from the past.

"Veronica," he said.

"Right. You've a good memory for a psycho," she observed, smiling.

"Tonight's my night off. I'm real straight."

"You look mature and distinguished with the white sideburns."

"Damn, I missed some," he said. "And you're really missing a custom—Er, a date?"

"Uh-huh. Seems like we've both thought about getting together too."

"True. You have dinner yet?"

She gave her hair a toss and smiled. "No, and I was looking forward to something special."

He took her arm. "I'll get us a table," he said, "and I've already got a great special in mind."

Croyd crumpled the note and left it in the ashtray.

❖ ❖ ❖

The trouble with women, Croyd reflected, was that no matter how good they might be in bed, eventually they wanted to use that piece of furniture for sleeping—a condition he was generally unable and unwilling to share. Consequently, when Veronica had finally succumbed to the sleep of exhaustion, Croyd had risen and begun pacing his Morningside Heights apartment, to which they had finally repaired sometime after midnight.

He poured the contents of a can of beef and vegetable soup into a pan and set it on the stove. He prepared a pot of coffee. While he waited for them to simmer and percolate, he phoned those of his other apartments with telephone answering machines and used a remote activator to play back their message tapes. Nothing new.

Finishing his soup, he checked whether Veronica was still asleep, then removed the key from its hiding place and opened the reinforced door to the small room without windows. He turned on its single light, locked himself in, and went to sit beside the glass statue reclining upon the day bed. He held Melanie's hand and began talking to her—slowly at first; but after a time the words came tumbling out. He told her of Dr. Finn and his sleep machine and talked about the Mafia and Demise and Eye and Danny Mao—whom he hadn't been able to run down yet—and about how great things used to be. He talked until he grew hoarse, and then he went out and locked the door and hid the key again.

Later, a pallid dawn spreading like an infection in the east, he entered the bedroom on hearing sounds from within.

"Hey, lady, ready for a coffee fix?" he called. "And a little angular momentum? A steak—"

He paused on observing the drug paraphernalia Veronica had set out on the bedside table. She looked up, winked at him, and smiled.

"Coffee would be great, lover. I take it light. No sugar."

"All right," he replied. "I didn't realize you were a user."

She glanced down at her bare arms, nodded. "Doesn't show. Can't mainline or you spoil the merchandise."

"Then what—"

She assembled a hype and filled it. Then she stuck out her tongue, took hold of its tip with the fingers of her left hand, raised it, and administered the injection in the underside.

"Ouch," Croyd commented. "Where'd you learn that trick?"

"House of D. Can I fix you up here?"

Croyd shook his head. "Wrong time of month."

"Makes you sound raggedy."

"With me it's a special need. When the time comes, I'll drop some purple hearts or do some benz."

"Oh, *bombitas. Sí,*" she said, nodding. "Speedballs, STP, high-octane shit. Crazy man's cooking. I've heard of your habits. Loco stuff."

Croyd shrugged. "I've tried it all."

"Not *yage*?"

"Yeah. It ain't that great."

"Desoxyn? Desbutol?"

"Uh-huh. They'll do."

"*Khat?*"

"Hell, yes. I've even done *huilca*. You ever try *pituri*? Now that's some good shit. Routine's a little messy, though. Learned it from an abo. How's about *kratom*? Comes out of Thailand—"

"You're kidding."

"No."

"Jeez, we'll never run out of conversation. Bet I can pick up a lot from you."

"I'll see that you do."

"Sure I can't set you up?"

"Right now coffee'll do fine."

The morning entered the room, spilling over their slow movements.

"Here's one called the Purple Monkey Proffers the Peach and Takes It Away Again," Croyd murmured. "Learned it—heard of it, that is—from the lady gave me the *kratom*."

"Good shit," Veronica whispered.

* * *

When Croyd entered the Twisted Dragon for the third time in as many days, he headed directly to the bar, seated himself beneath a red paper lantern, and ordered a Tsingtao.

A nasty-looking Caucasian with ornate scars all over his face occupied the stool two seats to his left, and Croyd glanced at him, looked away, and looked again. Light shone through the septum of the man's nose. There was a good-size hole there, and a patch of scabbed pinkish flesh occurred on the nose's tip. It was almost as if he had recently given up on wearing a nose ring under some duress.

Croyd smiled. "Stand too near a merry-go-round?"

"Huh?"

"Or is it just the *feng shui* in here?" Croyd continued.

"What the hell's *feng shui?*" the man said.

"Ask any of these guys," Croyd said, gesturing broadly. "Especially, though, ask Danny Mao. It's the way energy circulates in the world, and sometimes it gets you in a tricky bind. Lady from Thailand told me about it once. Like, killer *chi* will come blasting in that door, bounce off the mirror here, get split by that *ba-gua* fixture there and"—he chugged his beer, stepped down from his stool and advanced—"hit you right in the nose."

Croyd's movement was too fast for the man's eyes to follow, and he screamed when he felt that the finger had passed through his perforated septum.

"Stop it! My God! Cut it out!" he cried.

Croyd led him off his stool.

"Twice I've gotten the runaround in this joint," he said loudly. "I promised myself today that the first person I ran into here was going to talk to me."

"I'll talk to you! I'll talk! What do you want to know?"

"Where's Danny Mao?" Croyd asked.

"I don't know. I don't know any—aah!"

Croyd had crooked his finger, moved it in a figure eight, straightened it.

"Please," the man whined. "Let go. He's not here. He's—"

"I'm Danny Mao," came a well-modulated voice from a table partly masked by a dusty potted palm. Its owner rose and followed it around the tree, a middle-size Oriental man, expressionless save for a quirked eyebrow. "What's your business here, paleface?"

"Private," Croyd said, "unless you want to stand out on the street and shout."

"I don't give interviews to strangers," Danny said, moving toward him.

The man whose nose Croyd wore on his finger whimpered as Croyd turned, dragging him with him.

"I'll introduce myself in private," Croyd said.

"Don't bother."

The man's fist flashed forward. Croyd moved his free hand with equal rapidity and the punch struck his palm. Three more punches followed, and Croyd stopped all of them in a similar fashion. The kick he caught behind the heel, raising the foot high and fast. Danny Mao executed a backward flip, landed on his feet, caught his balance.

"Shit!" Croyd observed, moving his other hand rapidly. The stranger howled as something in his nose snapped and he was hurled forward, crashing into Danny Mao. Both men went down, and the weeping man's nose gushed red upon them. "Bad *feng shui*," Croyd added. "You've got to watch out for that stuff. Gets you every time."

"Danny," came a voice from behind a carved wooden screen beyond the foot of the bar, "I gotta talk to you."

Croyd thought he recognized the voice, and when the small, scaly joker with the fanged, orange face looked around the screen's corner, he saw it to be Linetap, who had erratic telepathic abilities and often worked as a lookout.

"Might be a good idea," Croyd told Danny Mao.

The man with the bleeding nose limped off to the rest room while Danny flowed gracefully to his feet, brushed off his trousers, and gave Croyd a quick burning glance before heading back toward Linetap.

After several minutes' conversation Danny Mao returned from behind the screen and stood before him.

"So you're the Sleeper," Danny said.

"Yep."

"St. John Latham, of the law firm Latham, Strauss."

"What?"

"The name you're after. I'm giving it to you: St. John Latham."

"Without further struggle? Free, gratis and for nothing?"

"No. You will pay. For this information I believe that soon you will sleep forever. Good day, Mr. Crenson."

Danny Mao turned and walked away. Croyd was about to do the same when the man with the nose job emerged from the rest room, holding a large wad of toilet tissue to his face.

"Hope you know you've made the Cannibal Headhunters' shit list," he snuffled.

Croyd nodded slowly. "Tell them to mind the killer *chi*," he said, "and keep your nose clean."

V

After running a small favor for Veronica, reporting his progress to Theotocopoulos, and phoning Latham, Strauss for an appointment, Croyd met Veronica for dinner. As he told her of the day's doings, she shook her head when he told her about St. John Latham.

"You're crazy," she told him. "If he's that well-connected, what do you want to fool around with him for, anyway?"

"Somebody wanted to know about something he was up to."

She frowned. "I find a guy I like, I don't want to lose him so quick."

"I won't get hurt."

She sighed, put a hand on his arm. "I mean it," she said.

"So do I. I can take care of myself."

"What does that mean? How dangerous is it?"

"I've got a job to finish, and I think I'm almost there. I'll probably wrap it up soon without any sweat, get the rest of my money, and maybe take a little vacation before I sleep again. Thought we might go someplace real nice together—say, the Caribbean."

"Aw, Croyd," she said, taking his hand, "you've been thinking of me."

"Of course I've been thinking of you. Now, I've got an appointment with Latham for Thursday. Maybe I can finish this thing by the weekend. Then we'll have some time for just the two of us."

"You be careful, then."

"Hell, I'm almost done. Haven't had any problems yet."

◆ ◆ ◆

After stopping at one of his banks for additional funds, Croyd took a taxi to the building that held the law offices of Latham, Strauss. He had made the appointment by describing a fictitious case designed to sound expensive, and he arrived fifteen minutes ahead of time. On entering the waiting room he suppressed a sudden desire for medication. Hanging out with Veronica seemed to have him thinking about it ahead of schedule.

He identified himself to the receptionist, sat and read a magazine till she told him, "Mr. Latham will see you now, Mr. Smith."

Croyd nodded, rose, and entered the inner office.

Latham rose from his seat behind his desk, displaying an elegantly cut gray suit, and he offered his hand. He was somewhat shorter than Croyd, and his refined features remained expressionless.

"Mr. Smith," he acknowledged. "Won't you have a seat?"

Croyd remained standing. "No."

Latham raised an eyebrow, then seated himself. "As you would," he said. "Why don't you tell me about your case now?"

"Because there isn't one. What I really need is some information."

"Oh? That being?"

Instead of replying Croyd looked away, casting his gaze about the office. Then his hand moved forward, to pick up an orange and green stone paperweight from Latham's desk. He held it directly before him and squeezed. A cracking, grinding sound followed. When he opened his hand, a shower of gravel fell upon the desk.

Latham remained expressionless. "What sort of information are you seeking?"

"You have done work for the new mob," Croyd said, "the one trying to move in on the Mafia."

"Are you with the Justice Department?"

"No."

"DA's office?"

"I'm not a cop," Croyd responded, "and I'm not an attorney either. I'm just someone who needs an answer."

"What is the question?"

"Who is the head of this new family? That's all I want to know."

"Why?"

"Perhaps someone wishes to arrange a meeting with that person."

"Interesting," Latham said. "You wish to retain me to arrange such a meeting?"

"No, I only want to know who the person in charge is."

"Quid—pro—quo," Latham observed. "What are you offering for this?"

"I am prepared to save you," Croyd said, "some very large bills from orthopedic surgeons and physiotherapists. You lawyers know all about such matters, don't you?"

Latham smiled a totally artificial smile. "Kill me and you're a dead man, hurt me and you're a dead man, threaten me and you're a dead man. Your little trick with the stone means nothing. There are aces with fancier powers than that on call. Now, was that a threat you just made?"

Croyd smiled back. "I will die before too long, Mr. Latham, to be born again in a completely different form. I am not going to kill you. But supposing I were to cause you to talk to stop the pain, and supposing that later your friends were to put out a contract on the man you see before you. It wouldn't matter. He would no longer exist. I am a series of biological ephemera."

"You are the Sleeper."

"Yes."

"I see. And if I give you this information, what do you think will happen to me?"

"Nothing. Who's to know?"

Latham sighed. "You place me in an extremely awkward position."

"That was my intention"—Croyd glanced at his watch—"and I'm on a tight schedule. I should have begun beating the shit out of you about a minute and a half ago, but I'm trying to be a nice guy about this. What should we do, counselor?"

"I will cooperate with you," Latham said, "because I don't think it will make an iota of difference in what is going on right now."

"Why not?"

"I can give you a name, but not an address. I do not know from where they do business. We have always met in no-man's-land or spoken over the telephone. I cannot even give you a telephone number, however, for they have always gotten in touch with me. And I say that it will make no difference because I do not believe that the interests you represent are capable of doing them harm. This group is too well staffed with aces. Also, I am fully convinced that they are going to manage what we might refer to as a "corporate takeover" very soon. Should your employer wish to save lives and perhaps even settle for a bit of pocket money as something of a retirement bonus, I would be happy to try to arrange the terms for such an agreement."

"Naw," Croyd said, "I don't have any instructions for that kind of deal."

"I'd be surprised if you did." Latham glanced at his telephone. "But if you would like to relay the suggestion, be my guest."

Croyd did not move. "I'll pass the word along, with the name you're going to give me."

Latham nodded. "As you would. My offer to negotiate does not assure the acceptance of any particular terms, though, and I feel obliged to advise you that it may not be acceptable at all to the other side."

"I'll tell them that, too," Croyd said. "What's the name?"

"Also, to be completely scrupulous, I ought to tell you that if you force me to divulge the name, I have a duty to inform my client that this information has been given out, and to whom. I cannot take responsibility for any actions this might precipitate."

"The name of my client has not been stated either."

"As with so much else in life, we must be guided by certain suppositions."

"Stop beating around the bush and give me the name."

"Very well," Latham told him. "Siu Ma."

"Say again."

Latham repeated the name.

"Write it down."

He jotted the name on a pad, tore off the sheet, and handed it to Croyd.

"Oriental," Croyd mused. "I take it this guy is head of a tong or a triad or a yakuza—one of those Asian culture clubs?"

"Not a guy."

"A woman?"

The attorney nodded. "Can't give you a description either. She's probably short, though."

Croyd looked fast, but he could not decide whether the residue of a smile lay upon the other's lips.

"And I'll bet she's not in the Manhattan directory either," Croyd suggested.

"Safe bet. So I've given you what you came for. Take it home, for all the good it will do you." He rose then, turned away from his desk, moved to a window, and stared down into traffic. "Wouldn't it be great," he said after a time, "if there were a way for you wild card freaks to bring a class action suit against the Takisians?"

Croyd let himself out, not totally pleased with what he had let himself in for.

* * *

Croyd required a restaurant with a table within shooting distance of a pay phone. He found what he was looking for on his third try, was seated, placed his order, and hurried to make his first call. It was answered on the fourth ring.

"Vito's Italian."

"This is Croyd Crenson. I want to talk to Theo."

"Hold on a minute. Hey, Theo!" Then, "He's coming."

Half a minute. A minute.

"Yeah?"

"This Theo?"

"Yeah."

"Tell Chris Mazzucchelli that Croyd Crenson's got a name for him and needs to know where he wants to hear it."

"Right. Call me back in half an hour, forty-five minutes, okay?"

"Sure."

Croyd phoned Tavern-on-the-Green then and was able to make reservations for two at eight-fifteen. Then he phoned Veronica. It was answered on the sixth ring.

"Hello?" Her voice sounded weak, distant.

"Veronica, love, it's Croyd. Not to be carried away, but I think I'm just about done with this job and I want to celebrate. What say we cut out about seven-thirty and start doing it?"

"Oh, Croyd, I really feel shitty. I ache all over, I can't keep anything down, and I'm so weak I can hardly hold the phone up. It's gotta be flu. All I'm good for is sleeping."

"I'm sorry. You need anything? Aspirins? Ice cream? Horse? Snow? *Bombitas*? You name it and I'll pick it up."

"Aw, that's sweet, lover. But no. I'll be okay, and I don't want to expose you to this thing. I just want to sleep. Okay?"

"All right."

Croyd headed back to his table. His food arrived moments later. When he finished it, he ordered again and rolled a pair of pills between his thumb and forefinger. Finally he took them with a swallow of iced tea. Then he ordered again and checked various of his personal phones for messages till his next order arrived. He went back and took care of it, then buzzed Theo again.

"So what'd he say?"

"I haven't been able to get hold of him, Croyd. I'm still trying. Get back to me in maybe an hour."

"I will," Croyd said, and he called Tavern-on-the-Green and canceled his reservation, then returned to his table to order a few desserts.

He phoned before the hour had run as there were a number of matters he was anxious to attend to. Fortunately Theo had made a connection in the meantime, and he gave him an apartment address on the upper East Side. "Be there nine o'clock tonight. Chris wants you to make a full report to the management."

"It's just a lousy name I could give him over the phone," Croyd said.

"I am only a message service, and that is the message."

Croyd hung up and paid his tab, the afternoon open before him.

As he stepped outside, a short, broad-shouldered man with an Oriental cast to his features emerged from a doorway perhaps ten feet to the left, hands within his blue satin jacket, gaze focused on the ground. As he turned toward Croyd, he raised his head and their eyes met for a moment. Croyd felt later that he had known in that instant what was to occur. Whatever the case, he knew for certain a moment later when the man's right hand emerged from his jacket, fingers wrapped in an unusual grip about the hilt of a long, slightly curved knife, its blade extending back along the man's forearm, edge outward. Then his left hand emerged as he moved forward, and it held a matching blade in an identical grip. Both weapons moved in unison as his pace accelerated.

Croyd's abnormal reflexes took over. As he moved forward to meet the attack, it seemed as if the other had suddenly dropped into slow motion. Turning to match the double-bladed pass, Croyd reached across a line of gleaming metal, caught a hand, and twisted it inward. The weapon's edge was rotated back toward the attacker's abdomen. Its point entered there, moved diagonally upward, and was followed by a rush of blood and innards. As the man doubled, Croyd beheld the white egret that decorated the jacket's back.

Then the window at his side shattered and the sound of a gunshot rang in his ears. Turning, drawing his collapsed assailant before him, he saw a dark, late-model car moving slowly along the curbside, almost parallel to him. There were two men in the vehicle, the driver and a passenger in the rear seat who was pointing a pistol in his direction through the opened window.

Croyd moved forward and stuffed the man he held into the car. He did not fit through the window easily, but Croyd pushed hard and he went in nevertheless, losing only a few pieces along the way. His final screams were mixed with the roar of the engine as the car jumped forward and raced off.

It had been, he realized, a kind of proof that Latham had told him the truth and nothing but, though not necessarily the whole truth; and by this he was pleased with his work, after a fashion. Now, though, he had to start looking over his shoulder and keep it up till he had his money. And this was aggravating.

He stepped over some of his attacker's odds and ends and felt in his pocket for one of his pillboxes. Aggravating.

❖ ❖ ❖

As Croyd approached the apartment building that evening, he noted that the man in the car parked before it appeared to be speaking into a small walkie-talkie and staring at him. He'd grown very conscious of parked cars following the second attempt on his life, a little earlier. Massaging his knuckles, he turned suddenly and stepped toward the car.

"Croyd," the man said softly.

"That's right. We'd better be on the same side."

The man nodded and shifted a wad of chewing gum into his left cheek. "You can go on up," he said. "Third floor, apartment thirty-two. Don't have to ring. Guy by the door'll let you in."

"Chris Mazzucchelli's there?"

"No, but everyone else is. Chris couldn't make it, but it don't matter. You tell those people what they want to know. It's the same as telling him."

Croyd shook his head. "Chris hired me. Chris pays me. I talk to Chris."

"Wait a minute." The man pressed the button on his walkie-talkie and began speaking into it in Italian. He glanced at Croyd after a few moments, raised his index finger, and nodded.

"What's comin' down?" Croyd asked when the conversation was concluded. "You find him all of a sudden?"

"No," the guard answered, shifting his wad of gum. "But we can satisfy you everything's okay in just a minute."

"Okay," Croyd said. "Satisfy me."

They waited. Several minutes later a man in a dark suit emerged from the building. For a moment Croyd thought it was Chris, but on closer inspection he realized the man to be thinner and somewhat taller. The newcomer approached and nodded to the guard, who nodded at Croyd and said, "There he is."

"I'm Chris's brother," the man said, smiling faintly, "and that's as close as we can get at the moment. I can speak for him, and it's okay for you to tell the gentlemen upstairs what you've learned."

"Okay," Croyd said. "That's good. But I was thinking about collecting the rest of my money from him too."

"I don't know about that. Maybe you better ask Vince about it. Schiaparelli. He sometimes does payroll. Maybe you shouldn't, though."

Croyd turned toward the guard. "You've got the bitchbox. You call the guy and ask him. The other side's already hit on me today for what I got. If my money's not here, I'm walking."

"Wait a minute," Chris's brother said. "No reason to get upset. Hang on."

He pointed at the walkie-talkie with his thumb and the guard spoke into it, listened, waited, glanced at Croyd.

"They're getting Schiaparelli," the guard said. After a longer while he listened to a low squawking, spoke, listened again, looked at Croyd again. "Yeah, he's got it," he told Croyd.

"Good," Croyd said. "Have him bring it down."

"No, you go up and get it."

Croyd shook his head.

The man stared at him and licked his lips, as if loath to relay the message. "This does not make a very good impression, for it is as if you had no trust."

Croyd smiled. "It is also correct. Make the call."

This was done, and after a time a heavyset man with graying hair emerged from the building and stared at Croyd. Croyd stared back.

The man approached. "You are Mr. Crenson?"

"That is correct."

"And you want your money now?"

"That's the picture."

"Of course I have it here," the other told him, reaching into his jacket. "Chris sent it along. It will grieve him that you are so suspicious."

Croyd held out his hand. When the envelope was placed in it, he opened it and counted. Then he nodded. "Let's go," he said, and he followed Schiaparelli and Chris's brother into the building. The man with the walkie-talkie was shaking his head.

Upstairs, Croyd was introduced to a group of old and middle-aged men and their bodyguards. He declined a drink, just wanting to give them the name and get out. But it occurred to him that giving them the money's worth might entail stretching the story out a bit to show that he'd earned it. So he explained things, step by step, from Demise to Loophole. Then he told them of the attempt to take him out following that interview, before he finally got around to giving them Siu Ma's name.

The expected question followed: Where could she be found?

"This I do not know," Croyd replied. "Chris asked me for a name, not for an address. You want to hire me to get that for you, too, I suppose I could do it, though it would be cheaper to use your own talent."

This drew some surly responses, and Croyd shrugged, said goodnight, and walked out, stepping up his pace to the blur level as the muscle near the door looked about, as if for orders.

It was not until a couple of blocks later that a pair of such street troops caught up and attempted to brace him for a refund. He tore out a sewer grating, stuffed their bodies down through the opening and replaced it, for his final bit of subtlety before closing the books on this one.

VI

Croyd took a taxi crosstown, then hiked a circuitous route to his Morningside Heights apartment. There were no lights on within, and he entered quickly and quietly, painkillers, antihistamines, psychedelics, and a five-pound box of assorted chocolates all gift-wrapped together in a gaudy parcel beneath his arm. He flipped on the hall light and slipped into the bedroom.

"Veronica? You awake?" he whispered.

There was no reply, and he crossed to the bedside, lowered himself to a seated position, and reached out. His hand encountered only bedclothes.

"Veronica?" he said aloud.

No reply.

He turned on the bedside lamp. The bed was empty, her stuff gone. He looked about for a note. No. Nothing. Perhaps in the living room. Or the kitchen. Yes. Most likely she'd leave it in the refrigerator where he'd be certain to find it.

He rose, then halted. Was that a footstep? Back toward the living room?

"Veronica?"

No reply.

Foolish of him to have left the door open, he suddenly realized, though there had been no one in the hallway.

He reached out and extinguished the lamp. He crossed to the door, dropped silently to the floor, moved his head outside at floor level, and drew it back quickly.

Empty. No one in the hall. No further sounds either.

He rose and stepped outside. He walked back toward the living room.

In the dim light from the hallway, as he rounded the corner, he beheld a Bengal tiger, and its tail twitched once before it sprang at him.

"Holy shit!" Croyd commented, dropping Veronica's present and leaping to the side.

Plaster shattered and fell as he caromed off the wall, an orange and black shoulder grazed him in passing, and he threw a punch that slid over the animal's back. He heard it growl as he leaped into the living room. It turned quickly and followed him, and he picked up a heavy chair and threw it as the beast sprang again.

It roared as the chair struck it, and Croyd overturned a heavy wooden table, raised it like a shield, and rushed with it against the animal. The tiger shook itself, snarling, as it batted the chair aside. It turned and caught the table's flat surface upon a smooth expanse of shoulder muscle. Then it swung a paw over the table's upper edge. Croyd ducked, pushed forward.

The big cat fell back, dropped out of sight. Seconds crept by like drugged cockroaches.

"Kitty?" he inquired.

Nothing.

He lowered the table a foot. With a roar the tiger sprang. Croyd snapped the table upward, faster than he could remember ever having lifted a piece of furniture before. Its edge caught the tiger a terrible blow beneath the jaw, and it let out a human-sounding whimper as it was turned sideways and fell to the floor. Croyd raised the table high and slammed it down atop the beast, as if it were a giant flyswatter. He raised it again. He halted. He stared.

No tiger.

"Kitty?" he repeated.

Nothing.

He lowered the table. Finally he set it aside. He moved to the wall switch and threw it. Only then did he realize that the front of his shirt was torn and bloody. Three furrows ran down the left side of his chest from collarbone to hip.

On the floor, a bit of whiteness…

Stooping, he touched the object, raised it, studied it. He held one of those little folded paper figures—origami, he remembered, the Japanese called them. This one was…a paper tiger. He shivered at the same time as he chuckled. This was almost supernatural. This was heavy shit. It occurred to him then that he had just fought off another ace—one with a power he did not understand—and he did not like this a bit. Not with Veronica missing. Not with his not even knowing which side had sent the stranger ace to take him out.

He locked the door to the hallway. He opened Veronica's present, took out the bottle of Percodans and tossed off a couple before he hit the bathroom, stripped off his shirt, and washed his chest. Then he fetched a beer from the refrigerator and washed down a French green with it, to provide the Percs with some contrast. There was no note propped against the milk carton or even in the egg drawer, and this made him sad.

When the bleeding stopped, he washed again, taped a dressing in place, and drew on a fresh shirt. He was not even sure whether he had been followed or whether this had been a stakeout. Either way, he wasn't going to stick around. He hated abandoning Veronica if someone really had a make on the place, but at the moment he had no choice. It was a very familiar feeling: they were after him again.

❖ ❖ ❖

Croyd rode subways and taxis and walked for over four hours, crouched behind his mirrorshades, crissing and crossing the island in a pattern of evasion calculated to confuse anybody. And for the first time in his life he saw his name up in lights in Times Square.

CROYD CRENSON, said the flowing letters high on the buildingside, CALL DR. T. EMERGENCY

Croyd stood and stared, reading it over and over. When he had convinced himself it was not a hallucination, he shrugged. They ought to know he'd stop by and pay his bill when he got a chance. It was damn humiliating, implying to the whole world that he was a deadbeat. They'd probably even try to charge him for a bed, too, he guessed, when broom closets should be a lot cheaper. Out to screw him, the same as everyone else. They could damn well wait.

Cursing, he ran for a subway entrance.

❖ ❖ ❖

Heading south on the Broadway line, sucking on a pair of purple hearts and a stray pyrahex he'd found at the bottom of his pocket, Croyd was amazed and impressed that Senator Hartmann actually did seem a man of the people, boarding the train at the Canal Street Station that way. Then another Senator Hartmann followed him. They glanced his way, conferred for an instant, and one leaned out the door and hollered something, and more Hartmanns came running. There were tall Hartmanns, short Hartmanns, fat Hartmanns and even a Hartmann with an extra appendage—seven Hartmanns in all. And Croyd was not so unsophisticated as to fail in realizing, this near Jokertown, that Hartmanns was the Werewolves' face of the day.

The doors closed, the train began to move, the tallest Hartmann turned, stared, and approached.

"You Croyd Crenson?" he asked.

"Nope," Croyd replied.

"I think you are."

Croyd shrugged. "Think whatever you want, but do it someplace else if you want my vote."

"Get up."

"I am up. I'm a lot higher than you. And I'm up for anything."

The tall Hartmann reached for him, and the other Hartmanns began a swaying advance.

Croyd reached forward, caught the oncoming hand, and drew it toward his face. There followed a crunching sound, and the tall Hartmann screamed as Croyd jerked his head to the side, then spat out the thumb he had just bitten off the hand he held. Then he rose to his feet, still holding the Werewolf's right wrist with his left hand. He jerked the man forward and drove the fingers of his free hand deep into his abdomen and began drawing them upward. Blood spurted and ribs popped and protruded.

"Always following me," he said. "You're a real pain in the ass, you know? Where's Veronica?"

The man commenced a coughing spasm. The other Werewolves halted as the blood began to flow. Croyd's hand plunged again, downward this time. Red up to the elbow now, he began drawing out a length of intestine. The others began to gag, to back toward the rear of the car.

"This is a political statement," Croyd said as he raised the gory Hartmann and tossed him after the others. "See you in November, motherfuckers!"

* * *

Croyd exited quickly at the Wall Street Station, tore off his bloody shirt, and tossed it into a trash receptacle. He washed his hands in a public fountain before departing the area, and he offered a big black guy who'd said, "You *really* a Whitey!" fifty bucks for his shirt—a pale blue, long-sleeved polyester affair, which fit him fine. He trotted over to Nassau then, followed it north till it ran into Centre. He stopped in an OPEN ALL NIGHT Greek place and bought two giant styrofoam cups of coffee, one for each hand, to sip as he strolled.

He continued up to Canal and bore westward. Then he detoured several blocks to a café he knew, for steak and eggs and coffee and juice and more coffee. He sat beside the window and watched the street grow light and come alive. He took a black pill for medicinal purposes and a red one for good luck.

"Uh," he said to the waiter, "you're the sixth or seventh person I've seen wearing a surgical mask recently…"

"Wild card virus," the man said. "It's around again."

"Just a few cases, here and there," Croyd said, "last I heard."

"Go listen again," the man responded. "It's close to a hundred—maybe over—already."

"Still," Croyd mused, "do you think a little strip of cloth like that will really do you any good?"

The waiter shrugged. "I figure it's better than nothing… More coffee?"

"Yeah. Get me a dozen donuts to go, too, will you?"

"Sure."

He made his way to the Bowery via Broome Street, then on down toward Hester. As he drew nearer, he saw that the newsstand was not yet open, and Jube nowhere in sight. Pity, he'd a feeling Walrus might have some useful information or at least some good advice on dealing with the fact that both sides in the current gang war periodically took time out to shoot at him—say, every other day. Was it sunspots? Bad breath? It was rapidly ceasing to be cost effective for the Mob to keep chasing him to recover his fee for his investigation—and Siu Ma's people must have hit at him enough by now to have recovered a lot more face than he'd ever cost them.

Munching a donut, he passed on, heading for his Eldridge apartment. Later. No rush. He could talk to Jube by and by. Right now it would be restful to lean back in the big easy chair, his feet up on the ottoman, and close his eyes for a few minutes…

"Shit!" he observed, tossing half a donut down the stairwell to a vacant basement flat as he turned the corner onto his block. Was it getting to be that time already?

Then he continued to turn with that rapid fluidity of movement that had come with the territory this time around, following the donut down into darkness where the asthmatic snuffling of some ancient dog would have been distracting but for the fact that he was viewing, even as he descended, a classical stakeout up the street near his pad.

"Son-of-a-bitch!" he added, just his head above ground level now, outline broken by a length of upright piping that supported the side railing.

One man sat in a parked car up past the building, in view of its front entrance. Another sat on a stoop, filing his nails, in command of an angled view of the rear of the building from across the side alley.

Croyd heard a panicked gasping as he swore, unlike any doggy sound with which he was familiar. Glancing downward and back into the shadows, he beheld the quivering, amorphous form of Snotman, generally conceded to be the most disgusting inhabitant of Jokertown, as he cringed in the corner and ate the remains of Croyd's donut.

Every square inch of the man's surface seemed covered with green mucus, which ran steadily from him and added to the stinking puddle in which he crouched. Whatever garments he had on were so saturated with it as to have become barely distinguishable—like his features.

"For Christ's sake! That's filthy and I was eating on it!" Croyd said. "Have a fresh one." He extended the bag toward Snotman, who did not move. "It's okay," he added, and finally he set the bag down on the bottom step and returned to watching the watchers.

Snotman finished the discarded fragment and remained still for some time. Finally, he asked, "For me?"

His voice was a liquid, snotty, snuffling thing.

"Yeah, finish 'em. I'm full," Croyd said. "I didn't know you could talk."

"Nobody to talk to," Snotman replied.

"Well—yeah. That's the breaks, I guess."

"People say I make them lose their appetites. Is that why you don't want the rest?"

"No," Croyd said. "I got a problem. I'm trying to figure what to do next. There're some guys up there have my place covered. I'm deciding whether to take them out or just go away. You don't bother me, even with that gunk all over you. I've looked as bad myself on occasion."

"You? How?"

"I'm Croyd Crenson, the one they call the Sleeper. I change appearance every time I sleep. Sometimes it's for the better, sometimes it isn't."

"Could I?"

"What? Oh, change again? I'm a special case, is what it is. I don't know any way I could share that with other people. Believe me, you wouldn't want a regular diet of it."

"Just once would be enough," Snotman answered, opening the bag and taking out a donut. "Why are you taking a pill? Are you sick?"

"No, it's just something to help me stay alert. I can't afford to sleep for a long time."

"Why not?"

"It's a long story. Very long."

"Nobody tells me stories anymore."

"What the hell. Why not?" Croyd said.

VII

When Snotman grew ill, Croyd snapped the lock on the door behind him, letting him into the dusty ruin of a small two-room apartment whose owner was obviously using the place to store damaged furniture. He located a threadbare couch on which the glistening joker sprawled, quivering. He rinsed a jelly jar he found near a basin in the next room and took him a drink of water. Sweeping aside a mess of ancient drug paraphernalia, Croyd seated himself on a small cracked bench as the other sipped.

"You been sick?" Croyd asked him.

"No. I mean, I always feel like I've got a cold, but this is different. I feel sort of like I did a long time ago, when it all started."

Croyd covered the shivering joker with a pile of curtains he found in a corner, then seated himself again.

"Finish telling me what happened," Snotman said after a time.

"Oh, yeah."

Croyd popped a methamphet and a dex and continued his tale. When Snotman passed out, Croyd did not notice. He kept talking until he realized that Snotman's skin had gone dry. Then he grew still and watched, for the man's features seemed slowly to be rearranging themselves. Even speeded, Croyd was able to spot the onset of a wild card attack. But even speeded, this did not quite make sense. Snotman was already a joker and Croyd had never heard of anyone—himself excluded—coming down with it a second time.

He shook his head, rose and paced, stepped outside. It was afternoon now, and he was hungry again. It took him a few moments to spot the new shift that had taken over surveillance of his quarters. He decided against disposing of them. The most sensible thing to do, he guessed, would be to go and get a bite to eat, then come back and keep an eye on the now-transforming Snotman through his crisis, one way or the other. Then clear out, go deeper underground.

In the distance a siren wailed. Another Red Cross helicopter came and went, low, from the southeast, heading uptown. Memories of that first mad Wild Card Day swam in his head, and Croyd decided that perhaps he'd better acquire a new pad even before he ate. He knew just the sleaze-bin, not too far away, where he could get in off the streets and no questions asked, provided they had a vacancy—which was generally the case. He detoured to check it out.

Like a mating call, another siren answered the first, from the opposite direction. Croyd waved at the man who hung upside down by his feet from a lamppost, but the fellow took offense or grew frightened and flew away.

From somewhere he heard a loudspeaker mentioning his name, probably saying terrible things about him.

His fingers tightened on the fender of a parked car. The metal squealed as he pulled at it, tearing a wide strip loose. He turned then, bending it, folding it, blood dripping from a tear in his hand. He would find that speaker and destroy it, whether it was high on a buildingside or the top of a cop car. He would stop them from talking about him. He would…

That would give him away, though—he realized in a moment's clarity—to his enemies, who could be anybody. Anybody except the guy with the wild card virus, and Snotman couldn't be anybody's enemy just now. Croyd hurled the piece of metal across the street, then threw back his head and began to howl. Things were getting complicated again. And nasty. He needed something to calm his nerves.

He plunged his bloody hand into his pocket, withdrew a fistful of pills, and gulped them without looking to see what they were. He had to get presentable to go and get a room.

He ran his fingers through his hair, brushed off his clothes, began walking at a normal pace. It wasn't far.

VIII

Again they were after him. If you can't even trust your doctor, he wondered, who can you trust? The sirens' wails were almost a steady sheet of sound now.

He hurled chunks of concrete, broke streetlights, and dashed from alley to doorway. He crouched within parked cars. He watched the choppers go by, listening to the steady *phut-phut* of their blades. Every now and then he heard parts of appeals over some loudspeaker or other. They were talking to him, lying to him, asking him to turn himself in. He chuckled. That would be the day.

Was it all Tachy's fault again? An image flashed before his mind's eye, of Jetboy's small plane darting like a tiny fish among great, grazing whales there in the half-clouded sky of an afternoon. Back when it all began. What had ever happened to Joe Sarzanno?

He smelled smoke. Why did things always get burned in times of trouble? He rubbed his temples and yawned. Automatically he sought in his pocket after a pill, but there was nothing there. He tore open the door to a Coke machine before a darkened service station, broke into the coin box, then fed quarters back into the mechanism, collected a Coke for either hand, and walked away sipping.

After a time he found himself standing before the Jokertown Dime Museum, wanting to go inside and realizing that the place was closed.

He stood undecided for perhaps ten seconds. Then a siren sounded nearby. Probably just around the corner. He moved forward, snapped the lock, and entered. He left the price of admission on the little desk to his left and as an afterthought, tossed in something for the lock.

He sat on a bench for a while, watching shadows. Every now and then he rose, strolled, and returned. He saw again the golden butterfly, poised as if about to depart from the golden monkey wrench, both of them transmuted by the short-lived ace called Midas. He looked again at the jars of joker fetuses, and at a buckled section of a metal door bearing Devil John's hoofprint.

He walked among the Great Events in Wild Card History dioramas pressing the button over and over again at the Earth vs. Swarm display. Each time that he hit it, Modular Man fired his laser at a Swarm monster. Then he located one that made the statue of the Howler scream…

It was not until his final Coke was down to its last swallow that he noticed the diminutive human skin, stuffed, displayed in a case. He pressed nearer, squinting, and read the card that identified it as having been found in an alley. He sucked in his breath as the recognition hit him.

"Poor Gimli," he said. "Who could have done this to you? And where are your insides? My stomach turns at it. Where are your wisecracks now? Go to Barnett, tell him to preach till all hell freezes. In the end it'll be his hide, too."

He turned away. He yawned again. His limbs were heavy. Rounding a corner, he beheld three metal shells, suspended by long cables in the middle of the air. He halted and regarded them, realizing immediately what they were.

On a whim he leaped and slapped the nearest of the three—an armor-plated VW body. It rang all about him and swayed slightly on its moorings, and he sprang a second time and slapped it again before another yawning jag seized him.

"Have shell, will travel," he muttered. "Always safe in there, weren't you, Turtle—so long as you didn't stick your neck out?"

He began to chuckle again, then stopped as he turned to the one he remembered most vividly—the sixties model—and he could not reach high enough to trace the peace symbol on its side, but " 'Make love, not war,' " he read, the motto painted into a flower-form mandala. "Shit, tell that to the guys trying to kill me.

"Always wondered what it looked like inside," he added, and he leaped and hooked his fingers over the edge and drew himself upward.

The vehicle swayed but held his weight easily. In a minute he was sequestered within.

"Ah, sweet claustrophobia!" he sighed. "It *does* feel safe. I could…"

He closed his eyes. After a time he shimmered faintly.

Notes

Before switching to English literature, Zelazny majored in psychology and worked in a lab for over a year. His knowledge of and interest in psychology created the futuristic psychiatrist and the ro-womb (instead of a couch) in "He Who Shapes" / *The Dream Master*. Zelazny revisited psychology and technology as themes in this third Croyd Crenson tale; Croyd manages to sleep by using a device for brain wave entrainment and suggestion.

In its first appearance in *Wild Cards V: Down and Dirty*, this story interweaves with tales written by other authors. At the story's end, in his hyped-up state Croyd has become Typhoid Croyd, unwittingly transmitting the Wild Card virus to all he encounters.

A **concerto** is a musical composition for a solo instrument or instruments accompanied by an orchestra. Likewise, this story intermingles with others in this novel. A **siren** is a mythological woman whose singing lures sailors onto rocks; it can also mean a beautiful but dangerous woman; it is also the noise made by emergency vehicles. In this story, it refers to all three—Veronica, who leads Croyd further into addiction; Veronica, whom Croyd infects, transforms into an Ace who sucks the life out of males (detailed in a linked story); and the sirens at the end because of the plague's recurrence and the search for Croyd. **Serotonin** is a neurotransmitter and hormone produced by the brain; it regulates sleep and other behaviors (mood, appetite, sexuality, aggression, etc).

Chianti is Italy's most famous red wine. **Theotocopolos** was the painter El Greco. **Marcelled** hair has multiple waves set by a curling iron. **Chateau d'Yquem** is French wine from Graves in the southern part of

Bordeaux. **Compound eyes** of bees and other insects have thousands of **facets**. Croyd's eyes have only **216**. **Black Beauties** contain amphetamine (Speed) and dextroamphetamine. **Two-carafe problem** pays homage to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, for whom challenging puzzles would be a "three-pipe problem" in the original tales, and a "two-pipe problem" beginning in 1959's film adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. **Jack Daniels** is a brand of whiskey; **Schlitz** is a brand of beer. **Wattles** are fleshy lobes that hang from the throat turkeys and some other birds. A **palomino** is a horse with a golden coat and a white mane and tail. **Semantics** is study of word meanings. **Bennies** are amphetamines and **dexes** are dextroamphetamines. **Décolletage** is a low-cut neckline on a woman's dress. ***Sí*** means yes.

Numerous addictive stimulants are mentioned in rapid succession—**purple hearts** are blue triangular Drinamyl containing both Dextroamphetamine and Amobarbital (a barbiturate); **benz** is benzadrine; ***bombitas*** is a mix of heroin and amphetamines; **speedballs** are combination heroin and cocaine; **STP** is DOM or 4-Methyl-2,5-dimethoxyamphetamine; ***yage*** is Ayahuasca, a plant with near-mythical hallucinogenic properties; **Desoxyn** is methamphetamines/**speed**; **Desbutol** is a combination of methamphetamine and nembutal (pentobarbital); ***Khat*** is the alkaloid stimulant cathinone; ***huilca*** is DMT or dimethyltryptamine; ***pituri*** is an aboriginal drug that contains 5% nicotine (tobacco contains about 1%); ***kratom*** is a leaf containing many different alkaloids of which the main component may be 7-hydroxymitragynine; **Percodan** is oxycodone and aspirin.

Abo means aboriginal, now considered pejorative. **Tsingtao** is a Chinese beer; ***feng shui*** is the Chinese practice which seeks harmony with the environment by arranging spaces; ***chi*** is the spiritual energy that every living being possesses; ***ba-gua*** is an eight-sided "feng shui map" used to determine which part of a living space correlates with a particular situation in one's life. **Ephemera** are items of passing interest. A **tong** is a secret criminal organization of Chinese Americans; **Yakuza** are Japanese gangsters. **Takisian** are the people of Takis, Dr. Tachyon's planet of origin and the source of the Wild Card virus. **Horse** is heroin; **snow** is cocaine. **French blue** are amphetamines; **French green** is not a street drug name. **Pyrahex** may be an invented term.

SPRING MORNING: MISSIVE

To Spin Is Miracle Cat, Underwood-Miller 1981

Recently
I have escaped Legionnaire's Disease,
lost a day, gained one,
and learned that the Emperor penguin
gets laid only once a year.
I have also spent time wondering
for whom the galaxies wheel
and the oceans thunder.
It has been a fairly busy spring.
You ask after my health.
It is there.
I can go many lines without metaphor or moral
to show my stamina.

I shook my head at the disease at first,
but it is probably its own fault.
Like the penguins
it must have let opportunities slip by.
As for the days,
I cheated.
I dropped one Datelining,
did a double-take on the way back,
landed on my feelings for a beat.
As for the metaphor,
Life is a pair of doxies
leaning over a bridge rail
seeing who can spit farther.

As for the moral,
ask not for whom the galaxies wheel
and the oceans thunder.

After all, sailors steer
by pieces of the one,
crossing the others,
black-tie birds
do something similar,
spit in the ocean
is a popular hand,
spit in the hand
much less so,
London Bridge has fallen
to Havasu Lake,
days without number
are devilish for diarists,
Legionnaires are falling down
the oceans' wheel,
the galaxies' thunder;
the day is much too bright,
too warm for thought,
but note, and again,
there's no escape
from images unsought.

Notes

Legionellosis or **Legionnaires' disease** received its name in 1976 when pneumonia broke out among people attending an American Legion convention in Philadelphia. The reference suggests that Zelazny thought he was exposed but remained unaffected. The poem alludes to John Donne's poem "Meditation XVII"—"never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." A **missive** is a letter; **Datelining** refers to the gaining or losing of a day when crossing the International Dateline; **doxies** are prostitutes; **black-tie birds** are penguins. **Lake Havasu** is a resort city in Arizona, site of "the world-famous **London Bridge**." Learning that the old bridge faced destruction to make way for a new one, Lake Havasu City purchased it from the City of London in 1968, disassembled it, and rebuilt it in Arizona.

THE LONG SLEEP

Wild Cards XIII: Card Sharks, ed. George R. R. Martin, Baen Books 1993.
§ *Wild Cards*

"Tell me about Pan Rudo," Hannah said.

"Now I'm talking early fifties," Croyd answered. "That may be too far back for whatever you're after."

She shook her head.

"I want to hear about it," she told him.

He clapped his hands together abruptly, squashing a darting moth.

"Okay," he said. "I was around twenty years old at the time. But I'd been infected with the wild card virus when I was going on fourteen—so I'd had plenty of experience with it. Too much, it seemed. It still depressed me a lot in those days. I got to thinking about it, and I decided that since I couldn't change the condition maybe I could change my attitude toward it somehow, come to better terms with it. I read a lot of pop psychology books—about making friends with yourself and getting well-adjusted and all that—but they didn't do me any good. So one morning I saw a piece about this guy in the *Times*. He was chairing a local conference. Kind of interesting. Neuropsychiatrist. He'd actually known Freud, studied with him for a while. Then he was at the Jungian Institute in Switzerland for a time. Got back to physiology then. He was involved with a group doing *dauerschlaf* research while he was in Zurich. Ever hear of it?"

"Can't say that I have," she said.

He took a swallow of beer, moving his left foot to crush a pawing beetle.

"The theory behind *dauerschlaf* is that the body and the mind heal themselves better and faster while a person is asleep than when he's awake," he said. "They were experimenting with the treatment of drug withdrawal, psychological disorders, TB, and other stuff by putting people to sleep for long periods of time, using hypnosis and drugs. They'd induce artificial comas to promote healing. He wasn't into that much when I met him, but I'd learned of it earlier, because of my condition—and the connection intrigued me. I checked him out in the phone book, called, got his secretary, made an appointment. He had a cancellation for later that week, and she gave me that one."

Croyd took a quick swallow.

"It was a rainy Thursday afternoon in March of 1951 then, that I first met Pan Rudo—"

"Do you recall the date as well?" Hannah asked.

"Afraid not."

"How is it that you recall the year, the month, and the day so readily?"

"I count days after I wake up," he replied, "to keep track of how far along I am in my waking cycle. It gives me an idea of how much rationality I have left, so I can make plans for things I want to get done. When the days dwindle down to a precious few I avoid my friends and try to get off somewhere by myself so nobody gets hurt. Now, I woke up on Sunday, I came across the article two days later, I got the appointment for two days after that. That makes it a Thursday. And I tend to remember the months when things happen, because my picture of a year is kind of a jagged thing based on seasons. This piece was spring and rainy—March."

He took a drink of beer. He swatted another moth.

"Damn bugs!" he muttered. "Can't stand bugs."

"And the year?" she said. "How can you be sure it was 1951?"

"Because it was in the fall of the following year, 1952, that they tested the hydrogen bomb in the Pacific."

"Oh," she said, brow furrowing slightly. "Sure. Go ahead."

"So I went to see him the year before the hydrogen bomb got tested," he continued. "They were working on it then, you know. They'd decided to go ahead on it back in '48."

"Yes, I know," she said.

"A mathematician named Stan Ulam cracked the equations for Teller. Speaking of mathematicians, did you know that Tom Lehrer was a Manhattan Project mathematician? He wrote some great songs—"

"What happened when you got to Dr. Rudo's office?"

"Right," he responded. "Like I said, it was raining, and this trench coat I had on was dripping wet when I came into his reception area, and there was a pretty oriental rug on the floor. Looked as if it had silk in it, even. The receptionist hurried around her desk to help me, saying she'd hang it in their rest room rather than have it on a brass coat tree near the door which looked as if it held her own coat as well as the doctor's.

"I reached out and caught hold of all the water on the coat and the rug with my mind, and I removed it. I wasn't sure what to do with it then, so I held it in between places. You know what I'm talking about? You hear about Aces and Jokers who can teleport things—I've had the power a number of times myself—making things disappear in one place and reappear in another without seeming to pass through intervening space. But did you ever wonder where something is when it's in between places? I think about things like that a lot. Now I wasn't sure of my range yet—although it seemed I could send smaller objects farther off than larger ones—and wasn't sure how much water I'd just picked up, so couldn't say for certain that I could send it all outside his sixth-floor window and let it fall down onto Park. I had been experimenting this time, though, with hiding things in between places—at first just to see whether it could be done—and I learned that it could. I'd learned that I could make things disappear in one place and not appear in another for a while—though I felt a kind of pressure in my mind and body while I was doing it. So I just held my water and smiled.

" 'No need,' I told her. 'See? It's okay.'

"She stared at the thing as if it were alive, even running a hand over it, to make sure. Then she hung it on the tree.

" 'Won't you have a seat for a moment, Mr. Crenson?' she said. 'I'll let Dr. Rudo know you're here.'

"She moved toward the intercom on her desk, and I was about to ask her where that rest room was—so I could get rid of my water—when an inner door opened and Dr. Rudo came into the reception area. He was a six-footer, blond and blue-eyed, who put on a professional smile and extended his hand as he came up to me.

" 'Mr. Crenson,' he said. 'It is good to meet you. I am Pan Rudo. Won't you come into my office?' His voice was rich and resonant, his teeth very white.

" 'Thanks,' I said.

"He held the door for me and I entered the next room. It was brighter than I'd thought it might be, with a few pastoral watercolors bearing his signature and architectural etchings signed by others on the walls, another oriental rug on the floor, lots of reds and blues in it. A large aquarium occupied a table to the left of the door, bright fish darting and drifting within it, a chain of bubbles rising along a rear corner.

" 'Have a seat,' he told me, his speech slightly accented—German, and maybe something else—and he gestured toward a big, comfortable-looking leather chair facing his desk.

"I took the chair. He moved around the desk and seated himself. He smiled again, picking up a pencil and rolling it between his hands.

" 'Everybody who comes here has problems,' he began, maintaining eye-contact.

"I nodded.

" 'I'm no exception, I guess,' I told him. 'It's hard to know how to begin, though.'

" 'There are certain broad categories most people's problems fall into,' he said. 'Family, the people you work with…'

" 'No problems there,' I said. The pressure of holding the water was bothering me, and I looked around for a suitable container into which I might deposit it. A metal wastebasket would have been fine, but I couldn't see one anywhere about.

" 'Money? Sex?' he suggested.

" 'No, I've got plenty of money, and I get laid pretty regular,' I said, wondering whether I could move it beyond his window and let it go. Only, it was even farther away than the one in the reception area.

"I shifted in the chair and checked out the other side of the room.

" 'Mr. Crenson, is something bothering you—I mean something physical—right now?' he asked.

" 'Yeah,' I admitted, 'I'm having trouble holding my water.'

" 'There is a rest room outside,' he said, beginning to rise. 'I'll show you—'

" 'Not that way. I mean, like this water is sort of—in my head, I guess.'

"He froze. He stared at me.

" 'I'm afraid I don't understand exactly what you mean,' he said then. 'Water—in your head?'

"I grinned.

" 'Well, yes and no,' I said. 'I was speaking sort of figuratively. I mean, there's this water from my coat and I'm holding it with my mind and it's getting to be sort of a strain. So I should put it somewhere. Maybe I *will* just take it to that rest room and dump it there, if you'll show me—'

" 'Mr. Crenson, do you know what a defense mechanism is?' he asked.

" 'Sure, I've been doing my homework. It's something you do or say or think to keep from doing or saying or thinking something else you really want to but for some reason are afraid to. Oh, you think that's what this is. No, it's real water, and I'm carrying it and can make it be anywhere I want it to be inside of about a ten-foot radius from where I am right now—I think.'

"He smiled.

" 'Then why don't you deposit it in the fish tank?' he said. 'And we can get on with our conversation.'

" 'That's not a bad idea,' I said. 'It's pretty full, though.'

" 'That's all right,' he said.

"So I moved the water into the tank. Immediately, the thing overflowed. Dr. Rudo's eyes widened as he watched the water run down the sides and spill onto the floor. Then he gave me a strange look and reached out and worked his intercom.

" 'Mrs. Weiler, would you come in here a moment?' he said. 'And bring a mop and a pail? We've had a small accident. Thank you.'

"Then he lowered himself back into his chair and studied me for several seconds.

" 'Perhaps you should begin by telling me how you did what you just did,' he said.

" 'It's kind of long and involved,' I said. 'On the other hand, it's also the cause of the problem I came to see you about.'

" 'Take your time,' he told me.

" 'It was back in September of '46,' I began, 'the day Jetboy died…'

"Mrs. Weiler came in a couple of minutes later and was about to mop the wet area. I beat her to it and transported it all from the floor into the bucket. She stepped back and stared after the splash occurred.

" 'Just take it away,' Dr. Rudo told her. 'Then phone everyone who has an appointment this afternoon. Cancel all of them.

" 'Go ahead, Mr. Crenson, the whole story, please,' he said then, after she'd left.

"So I told him what it was like, and the thing that made my case different from all the others—how I fear sleeping more than anything else, and the things I do to postpone it. He questioned me at great length about the sleeping; and that was the first time I can remember hearing the word *dauerschlaf.* He seemed taken by my case and its parallels to an experimental European therapy technique he'd apparently once had something to do with. Also, as it turned out, he had heard of my case; and from the way he quoted medical journals, it seemed he'd read every important paper published on the wild card virus.

"I talked all afternoon. I told him about my family and old Bentley and the second-story work I used to do. I told him about my transformations, about my friends, about some of the scrapes I'd been involved in. I found myself starting to like the guy. I'd never really talked that way to anybody before. He seemed fascinated by the jokers and aces, by the different manifestations of the wild card virus I'd seen. Got me to talking about them at some length, shaking his head at my descriptions of some of the worst joker cases I've known. Even got into a long philosophical discussion with me as to what I thought it might be doing to the whole human race. I told him that not too many nats dated jokers, if it was the genetic angle he was thinking about, but he just kept shaking his head and said that wasn't the point, that their existing at all was like a cancer on human life in general, that you had to think of it sociologically as well as biologically. I allowed as he could have a point, but that it seemed one of those 'So what?' points. The situation was already in place, and the real questions involved what you were going to do about it. He agreed with me then, saying that he hoped it would be soon.

"Most of all, he seemed fascinated by my long sleeps—my *dauerschlafen*—and the way they pulled me apart and put me back together again. He questioned me about them at great length—how I felt going into them, coming out of them, whether I remembered anything that happened during them, whether I had any dreams while they were in progress. Then he told me about *dauerschlaf* as a form of therapy, of how his earlier work in Europe had involved the production of prolonged comas in non-wild card patients, by means of drugs and hypnosis, to capitalize on the remarkable recuperative abilities of the body and mind during sleep. He'd apparently gotten some very positive results with this, which was one of the reasons he found my case intriguing. The parallel struck him so forcibly, he said, that he would want to pursue the matter for that reason alone, even if he couldn't do more than adjust my feelings otherwise. But he felt that it could also be the means for doing even more for me."

Croyd finished his beer, fetched a second bottle and opened it.

"Mr. Crenson," Hannah Davis stated, and he met her eyes, "your tail seems to have developed wandering hands."

"Sorry," he said. "Sometimes it has a mind of its own."

The tiger-striped appendage emerged from beneath the table to lash behind him. Croyd took a drink.

"So the man represented himself as being able to cure your wild card condition?" she said.

"No," Croyd replied. "He never said that he could cure it. What he proposed later was something different—a rather ingenious-sounding way of stabilizing it in such a fashion that I'd no longer need to fear going to sleep."

"Of course he was a fraud," she said. "He took your money and he got your hopes up and then he couldn't deliver. Right?"

"Wrong," Croyd said. "He knew what he was talking about, and he was able to deliver. That wasn't the problem."

"Wait a minute," she said. "It would have made world headlines if someone had found a way to mitigate wild card effects. Tachyon would've picked up on it and been distributing it on street corners. If it worked, how come no one ever heard about it?"

Croyd raised his hand, and his tail.

"Bear with me. If it were simpler, I'd be done talking," he said. "Excuse me."

He was gone. A man-sized form flashed past the bar at the corner of her seeing. She heard a door open and close. When she looked toward the sound, there was no one in sight. A moment later, however, a shadow flashed by and Croyd was seated before her again, sipping his beer.

"Rapid metabolism," he explained.

"Pan Rudo," he continued then, as if there had been no interruption, "seemed quite taken with my story. I talked all afternoon, and he took pages and pages of notes. Every now and then he'd ask me a question. Later, Mrs. Weiler knocked on the door and told him it was quitting time and asked whether he wanted her to lock the office door when she left. He said no, he'd do it in a few minutes. Then he offered to take me to dinner and I took him up on it.

"We went out then and had a few steaks—he was surprised at my metabolism, too—and we continued to talk through dinner. Afterwards, we went to his apartment—a very nice pad—and talked some more, until fairly late. He'd learned my story by then, and a lot of other things I don't usually talk about, too."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well," Croyd said, "then, and in the days that followed, he told me about some of the more popular psychological theories. He'd even known the people who'd developed them. He'd studied with Freud for a while, and later at the Jungian Institute in Switzerland at the same time he was doing *dauerschlaf* research there. He told me about Freud's ideas on infantile sexuality, stages of development, sublimation, about ids and egos and superegos. And about Adler's drive to power and Rank's birth trauma. He talked about Jung's personality types and his theory of individuation. He said he felt that they all had something to them, some more for some people than others, or at different times in a person's life. He said that he was more interested in the final forms that these things took, in the emotional constructions they led to for a person's dealing with life. He felt that life is a compromise between what you want and what you get, and that there's always fear involved in the transaction—and it doesn't matter which of all the classical sources it springs from, it's just something that's always there. He said that we tell ourselves lies in order to deal with it—lies about the world, lies about ourselves. He had this idea, actually, from the playwright Ibsen, who called the big one—the big phony construct about yourself and the world—a 'life lie.' Rudo felt that everybody has one of these, and that it was just a matter of the degree of its falseness that made the difference between psychosis and neurosis. He told me that his whole approach to problems that weren't organic involved finding out a person's life lie and manipulating it so the patient can come to better terms with reality. Not to get rid of it. He said that some kind of life lie is necessary. Break it or tamper too deeply and you damage the personality, maybe drive the person completely nuts. He looked on therapy as a means of economizing the lie for better accommodation to the world."

Croyd paused for a drink.

"It sounds very manipulative," Hannah said, "and it seems as if it puts the therapist in a kind of godlike position. You help this guy find the key to your personality, then he goes in, looks around, and decides what to throw away, what to keep, what to remodel."

"Yeah, I guess it does," Croyd said, "when you put it that way."

"Granting that this approach is effective, it looks as if even a well-meaning adjustment might sometimes cause some damage—not even considering the possibility of willful abuse. Is that what he did to you? Mess with your self-image and your world-view?"

"Not exactly," Croyd said. "Not intentionally or directly. He explained that he did want to explore my life lie because he had to know my fears, because they would relate directly to what he had in mind for stabilizing my condition at a level I'd find emotionally satisfying."

"You did pick up the jargon, didn't you?"

"Well, I was reading a lot in the area the whole time he was working with me. I guess everyone does that."

He took another drink of beer.

"Are you stalling now?" she said. "Because you don't want to talk about those fears? If they're not essential to the story you can leave them out, you know."

"I guess I am," he acknowledged. "But I'd probably better mention them, for the sake of completeness. I don't know how much you know about me…"

"Mark Meadows told me a few things about you. But there were a lot of gaps. You sleep a lot. You lie low a lot—"

He shook his head.

"Not that kind of stuff," he said. "See, I'd thought of seeing a shrink for some time before I actually did. I guess I read a lot more in the area than I really let on—not just self-help books—some fairly heavy-duty stuff. There were two reasons for this. One is that I know what it feels like to be nuts—really out of your mind. I do it to myself regularly with amphetamines, because I'm afraid to go to sleep. And I usually wind up pushing it too far, and I can remember some of the crazy things and some of the terrible things I did when my thinking and my feelings were all screwed up. So I know what psychosis feels like, and I fear that almost as much as I do sleeping."

He laughed.

" 'Almost,' " he said. "Because they're really tied up together. Rudo showed me that, and I guess I owe him for the insight, if nothing else."

"I don't understand," she said, after he'd risen and stood staring out at a sudden rainfall for at least half a minute.

"My mother went crazy," he said then, "after the wild card business. Most likely, I was a big part of it. I don't know. Maybe it would have happened anyway. Maybe there was a schizoid gene involved. I loved her, and I saw her change. She spent her last years in asylums, died in one. I thought about it a lot in those days, wondering whether I might wind up that way, too. I was afraid of that kind of change. Then every time I took drugs to postpone sleeping I *did* go bonkers. I'm sure I know what she felt like, some of the things she went through…"

"Wouldn't it have been better just to sleep then?" Hannah asked. "After all, it was going to happen anyway."

Croyd turned and he was smiling.

"That's the same thing Rudo asked me," he said, and he walked slowly back to the table.

"I didn't know the answer then," he continued, "but he helped me to find it. It's a part of my life lie." He seated himself and folded his hands before him. "The way I came to see it, sleep for me represents a big unknown change. In a way, it's like death, and all of my normal death-fears are attached to it. But there's more to it than that. Rudo made me look into it deeply and I saw that my fear of insanity is also there. I always know that I'll be changed, and at some primitive level of my mind I fear that I'll wake up psychotic, like her, and it'll never go away. I saw her change too much."

He laughed then.

"Ironic," he said, "the way we make these stories we're always telling ourselves work. In a way, I drive myself crazy regularly to keep from going crazy. That's one of my places of irrationality. Everybody's got them."

"I'd think that once a therapist discovered that his first order of business would be to try to get rid of it."

Croyd nodded.

"Rudo told me that that's what most of them would try to do. But he wasn't at all certain but that it might be serving just that function—keeping me sane in the long run."

She shook her head.

"You've lost me," she said.

"Understandable. This part doesn't apply to nats. It has only to do with manifestations of the wild card virus. Rudo, as I said, had read all of the literature on the virus. He'd been impressed by certain conjectures based on anecdotal evidence, since there was no way of running controlled studies on them, to the effect that there is a psychosomatic component to the virus's manifestation. Like, there was once a kid—we called him Kid Dinosaur—who'd loved dinosaur books. He came up with the ability to turn himself into kid-sized replicas of different dinosaurs. And there's Hits Mack, a panhandler I know who can go up to any vending machine, hit it once and have it deliver him anything he wants from its display. That's all. It's the simplest wild card ability I know. Takes care of his meals and allows him to devote a hundred percent of his panhandling income to booze. He once told me that something like that had been a daydream of his for years. Lives on Twinkies and Fritos and stale chocolate bars. Happy man.

"Anyway," he went on, "Rudo felt that the anecdotal evidence was persuasive, and that there was a way to test it now. Me. He proposed inducing *dauerschlaf* in me by means of drugs and hypnosis that worked with the fears behind my life lie and caused me to change in an agreed-upon fashion. If it worked it would show that there was a psychosomatic component. It wouldn't be of help to any joker or ace in the world but me, though, and it could only be used to help me because of the periodic nature of my condition.

"So we set out to prove it, if we could. If the results were positive, he'd explained, then I could decide on the sort of body I wanted to live in for the rest of my life and whatever power I wanted to accompany it, and he'd induce it. He'd do it again for several times after that, to reinforce it, along with suggestions that it would always turn out that way, and I'd be set as a well-adjusted ace."

Croyd finished his beer, went back for another, stamping out a line of passing ants along the way.

"Is that where he crossed you up?" she asked.

"Nope, we tried it and it worked," he said. "He was right. So were the other people who'd made guesses along these lines. I told him I wanted to come out looking like Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*—I'd always liked that movie—and when I woke up I was a dead ringer for Bogie."

"Really? And what about a wild card ability? Was he able to do something with that, also?"

Croyd smiled.

"Yes," he said. "It was just a small ability, but for some reason it stuck. Maybe because it was so small it didn't take up much space wherever these things are managed. It followed me through any number of changes. Haven't tried it in years, though. Wait a minute."

He raised his beer can, took a slow drink, stared off into the distance.

"Play it, Sam," he said in a strangely altered voice. Then, "Play it!"

The tape recorder clicked to a halt. Then the Play button was depressed. The sounds of a piano playing "As Time Goes By" emerged from the small speaker.

She stared for several moments at the machine, then reached over and turned it off. Immediately, she set it on Record again.

"How—How do you manage it if there's no tape recorder around?"

"Almost anything that can be induced to vibrate in the audible range will do," he said. "I don't know how. Maybe it's even a smaller ability than Hits Mack's."

"So you woke up looking like Rick, and you could provide your own soundtrack whenever you wanted."

"Yes."

"What happened next?"

"He gave me a couple of weeks to enjoy it. Wanted to observe me and be sure there were no undesirable side-effects. I went out and got stopped on the streets and approached in restaurants for autographs.

Rudo wrote up his notes. He did send me to some friends for a full physical at that time, too. I still had an abnormally high metabolism and my usual insomnia."

"I wonder whether those notes still exist, somewhere?" she said.

Croyd shrugged.

"Don't know," he said. "wouldn't matter anyway. I wouldn't want anyone to mess with the process that way again."

"What happened?"

"We saw each other regularly during the next couple of weeks. I went over ideas of what I wanted to look like and what I wanted to be able to do. I didn't want to stay the way I was. It was fun the first few days, but after a while it wears kind of thin, looking like someone famous. I wanted to be sort of average in height and build, sandy-haired, not bad-looking but not real handsome. And I decided on a kind of telepathic persuasive ability I once had. You get in less trouble if you can talk your way out of things. And it could come in handy if I ever wanted to be a salesman. Rudo in the meantime said that he was studying medical literature, looking for anything else that might be useful in my case, to help nail down the change good and tight, to make it permanent. Once, when we were having lunch together, I remember him saying, 'Croyd, for all of that you know you'll still be a caricature of humanity. I just wish it were within my power to wipe out everything that demon bug did to you—wipe out all of the others, too, for that matter—and leave the human race as clean as it was before.'

" 'I appreciate everything you're doing, Doc,' I said. 'Seems like you've been devoting almost every waking minute to my case these past few weeks.'

" 'I think it's the most important case I've ever had,' he replied.

" 'Any new developments on the technical end of things?'

" 'Yes, I think there might be a way to reinforce the change by using certain levels of radiation on your nervous system,' he said.

" 'Radiation? I thought we were going the purely psychological route through *dauerschlaf*.'

" 'This is some very new stuff,' he said. 'I'm still looking into it.'

" 'You're the doctor,' I said. 'Keep me posted.'

"He picked up the tab again. Like always. And he wasn't even charging me for his therapy. Said he looked on it as a service to humanity. Gee, I liked the man."

"Mr. Crenson," she said. "The tail."

"Call me Croyd," he said.

"Croyd, I mean it. I don't care if it is a unique experience. This is business."

"Sorry," he said, tail flicking out behind him. "What are you doing tonight? This is a kind of dull place and—"

"I want to hear the rest of the story, Croyd. All this psychological talk's got me thinking maybe this is your way of avoiding it."

"Maybe you're right," he said. "I hadn't thought of that, but you may have a point. Sure. Okay. On with it.

"The days passed and I was really feeling good. I knew I wouldn't be dropping any speed this time around because I wasn't afraid to sleep. I'd seen my life lie—with sleep, madness, and death all twisted together—and I saw that I could face it, that the problem would be gone once the condition was stabilized. And Rudo was going to fix that good, once he'd worked out how this radiation therapy would apply, on top of the *dauerschlaf.*

"One day he asked me to lunch and we took a walk in Central Park afterwards. As we were strolling, with him looking at the landscape as if he wished he were settled somewhere painting it, he said to me, 'Croyd, how much longer have you got?'

" 'What do you mean?' I asked.

" 'Till it's time for you to sleep again,' he said.

" 'It's hard to tell for sure till I start getting the feeling," I said. 'But based on past experience I've got at least a week.'

" 'I wonder about inducing it beforehand,' he mused, 'to swing it.'

" 'Swing what?' I asked.

" 'First, let me ask you another question,' he said. 'You told me that you'd studied with an old second-story man named Bentley, and that you were engaged in that sort of business yourself.'

" 'That's right.'

" 'Just how good are you at that sort of thing?'

" 'Not bad,' I said.

" 'You still know how to go about it?'

" 'I'm not out of practice, if that's what you mean.'

" 'What if it were a place particularly security-conscious, well-guarded?'

"I shrugged.

" 'Couldn't really tell you till I cased it,' I said. 'Sometimes, you know, I'd come up with a wild card talent that really helped in these things.'

" 'Now, that's a thought…'

" 'What's the angle, Doc? What're you leading up to?'

" 'I've worked out what you need, Croyd, for the radiation part of the therapy. Unfortunately, the necessary materials are not available to civilians.'

" 'Who's got them?'

" 'Los Alamos Laboratories.'

" 'If they're medically useful you'd think they'd let some of the stuff loose, for humanitarian—'

" 'They wouldn't be useful for anyone but yourself. I had to adjust all of the equations to take your wild metabolism into account.'

" 'I see,' I said. 'And you're wondering whether I might be able to pry some of the stuff loose? Helping myself to help myself, so to speak?'

" 'In a word, yes.'

" 'That night be managed,' I said. 'How soon could I get a look at the premises?'

" 'There's the rub,' he said. 'I don't know how it can be done.'

" 'What do you mean?'

" 'The whole city is closed. There are checkpoints. If you're not authorized personnel you can't get by. It's a government installation. Top secret atomic research.'

" 'Oh. You mean it's not just the Lab, but the whole damn city's off-limits?'

" 'That's right.'

" 'This sounds a little trickier than breaking into an apartment or a store and cracking a safe, Doc. Are you sure we can't get this stuff someplace else?'

" 'Positive.'

" 'Shit!' I said. 'I don't know.'

" 'There are two possibilities, Croyd,' he said. 'You just reminded me of one of them. Now, neither one might be sufficient in itself to get the job done, but together—Together they might be sufficient.'

" 'Better let me in on it.'

" 'I've an—associate,' he said 'who might be able to help. He has connections at the Lab, I'm pretty certain.

" 'But he would have to be very circumspect.'

" 'What does that mean?'

" 'He could get you into the city without arousing suspicion. He could probably get you a look at the outside of the place—perhaps even a map of the inside.'

" 'Sounds like a good start,' I said.

" 'I'm going to be speaking with him as soon as I can reach him, and I'll find out more about the setup there. In the meantime, I'd like for you to be thinking of something. If we were to induce another change before we get there, what wild card talent might serve you best for the initial scouting? Bear in mind that we should be able to run another change after that to provide you with whatever would then feel most suitable for the job itself.'

" 'All right,' I said. 'You'll call me then?'

" 'Yes.'

"I had some unrelated business to take care of at the time, so I went off and spent a couple of days settling it. Then one evening I got a call from Rudo asking me whether I could come over to his place. I told him yes, and caught a cab.

" 'Croyd,' he said, 'I have learned things about this atomic city in New Mexico. You must have a pass with a photo on it to gain entrance. Such visitors' passes can be obtained in Santa Fe if you know someone in Los Alamos who notifies them that you are coming to see him, and then meets you at the Los Alamos gate.'

" 'We know such a person?' I asked.

" 'Yes, we have a man on their security staff who'll take care of it,' he said. 'That is, my friend has a friend who will manage things in this regard. It used to be under military security, but now the Atomic Energy Commission is providing the guards—and, as fortune would have it, there is a man in such a position who would be glad to do me this favor. This will get us into the town, and we will be staying at Fuller Lodge, which is where visitors are put up.'

" 'That does make it sound a little easier,' I said. 'Will your friend be able to get us to the place where I'll have to do the job?'

" 'I got the impression that he could point it out to you, but that actually getting you inside would be too risky for him.'

"I nodded.

" 'I guess that's where the right wild card power will come in handy.'

" 'I wonder,' he said. 'Getting in may not be the biggest problem. Getting out of town with it might be.'

" 'You said we could do the *dauerschlaf* business twice on this job?' I asked him.

" 'Why not?' he said. "What have you in mind?'

" 'I come out looking bland,' I said 'and equipped with a power that can get me a closer look at the premises. We visit the city and I case the place. Then I decide what's needed for the job and you induce it. I do the business, we take the goods to some nice, safe spot, and you give me the final treatment—radiation and all—and I can spend the rest of my life in a relatively normal fashion. And if there's ever anything you need, I'll take care of it for you.'

"He smiled.

" 'Your stabilization will be reward enough,' he said, moving to his bar and fetching us Cognacs in balloon snifters. 'I think this is going to prove an educational experience for both of us.'

" 'I'll drink to that,' I said, talking a big sniff.

"We touched glasses lightly.

" 'Confusion to our enemies,' he said.

"So we worked out my physical appearance for the job, and I detailed the power I thought I'd need. Then Rudo set about inducing the *dauerschlaf* which would provide it. We decided to travel across country by train to Lamy, New Mexico, where the travel agent would arrange for us to be met at the station by a pickup truck for the luggage. This was because I was to be a part of the luggage. It was decided that it would expedite matters for me to continue my *dauerschlaf* in a well-padded packing case. The agent also made us reservations at a place called La Fonda, in Santa Fe.

"And so I have no memories to speak of concerning the train tip. I went to sleep in Rudo's apartment and woke up in a packing case in a hotel room in Santa Fe. It's no fun being luggage. I woke in a pretzeled condition, with a little light leaking in around the upper edges of my confinement. The lid was still nailed tightly in place—as we'd agreed, to prevent any curious hotel maid from thinking the good doctor included a corpse as part of his travel gear. I listened for a while—a thing we'd also agreed upon—but heard no voices. Then I rapped on the nearest side of the case, to get his attention if he were present. There was no response. Since I could detect no motion, chances were I wasn't in transit. And the light seemed indication I was no longer in a boxcar. So I assumed I was either on a railroad platform, in the hotel lobby awaiting transport to a room, or in the room itself with Rudo having gone out somewhere. It seemed too quiet for a platform or a lobby, though. So…

"Twisting myself into a more congenial position, I extended my arms upward, felt the lid, and began to push. There followed a squealing of nails as it rose, and more light came to me. The lid came free on my right, then above my feet and head, finally falling aside to the left, nails bending, the wood making small splintering sounds.

"One deep breath then, and I rose to my feet, still unsteady. I was nude, since shape changing tends to ruin garments. But my suitcase held a variety of clothing purchased with my target physique in mind; and even as I rose I saw that piece of luggage, across the room on a rack.

"I stepped out of the case and made my way into the bathroom, where I showered. The mirror showed me a dark-haired, dark-eyed man as I shaved; about five-foot-eight, and of medium build. I finished putting myself in order and went back into the room, where I opened my suitcase and hunted out suitable garments.

"After I'd dressed I departed the room and found my way downstairs and into a Spanish-style lobby. From there, I saw a bar with tables at which people were eating. Which was what I was looking for—food. I was, as always on awakening, ravenous. But I stepped outside for a few moments first. There was a lot of adobe around me and what looked like a small park off to my left. There was a cathedral off to the right. I could investigate them later. The sun, which I'd come out to check stood a little past midheaven. Since I didn't know which way was east or west, it could be a little before noon or a little after. Either way, lunchtime, with half a day ahead of me.

"I went back inside and made my way into the bar. I found myself a table and read the menu. A number of items, such as enchiladas, were unfamiliar to me. So I just decided to order everything on the menu and work my way through. I'd also stopped at a newsstand I'd noticed off the lobby and picked up copies of all the papers they had, as is my wont upon awakening, to find out what had happened in the world while I slept.

"I had a succession of interesting things wrapped in tortillas, to the accompaniment of refried beans and rice, and was sitting there reading and waiting for the desserts to start arriving when Rudo came in, clad in a white suit and a natty sportshirt, camera over his shoulder. I was puzzled not at all as he strode on by me to order a Ramos Gin Fizz at the bar. You get used to being ignored by friends and acquaintances when you change your appearance every time you sleep.

"I caught his attention when he turned to sweep the bar with his gaze. I raised my hand and nodded.

" 'Ah! The eminent Dr. Rudo,' I said, faking a slight German accent.

"His eyes widened, then narrowed. He rose from his stool immediately and approached me, brow furrowed, drink still in his hand.

" 'I don't believe I recall…' he began.

"I rose and extended my hand.

" 'Meyerhoff,' I said, since I sometimes like to put people on. 'Carl Meyerhoff. We met before the war. Was it Vienna or Zurich? You were doing work with that long sleep business. Fascinating stuff. You had your little problems, I recall. I trust everything is going satisfactorily for you these days?'

"Quickly, he looked over both shoulders as I seated myself again. How long could I keep this going? I wondered. Several minutes would be great. So long as he didn't switch to another language…

"He drew out the chair across from me and seated himself quickly.

" 'Meyerhoff…' he said then. 'I am trying to remember… You are a medical man?'

" 'Surgeon,' I replied, figuring that was far enough away from psychiatry that he wouldn't trip me up with some comment involving his specialty. 'I got out when things got bad,' I added cryptically.

He nodded.

" 'I was fortunate in that respect, also,' he said. 'So, you are practicing here in the southwest?'

" 'California,' I said. 'I'm returning from a medical conference now. Just stopped here to do a little sightseeing. Yourself?'

" 'I am practicing in New York,' he said. 'This is a holiday for me, also. Striking landscapes here for painting, and the light is so pure. We met at a conference—or some hospital perhaps?'

"I nodded.

" 'I heard you speak once on this *dauerschlaf* therapy. I believe there was a small party that evening. We spoke for a time of some of the troubles…' I let it trail off, open to interpretation as to troubles with the therapy, with friends, associates, family, European politics. His reactions had me curious now, and I wanted to see what he'd say. And if he got very evasive that would be interesting, too.

"He sighed.

" 'They looked at things differently in those days,' he said, 'where I came from. And the early work, of course, had to be experimental.'

" 'Of course,' I said.

" 'When did you leave?'

" '1944,' I replied. 'Spent some time in Argentina. Came here later under the Project Paper Clip dispensation.'

"He raised his drink and took a swallow.

" 'Yes, I've heard of it,' he said. 'Governments can be gracious—when they want something.'

"He laughed. I joined him.

" 'Fortunately, there was no need for me to employ such a route,' he went on. 'Some of the past died with the bombings and the records they destroyed, as I understand it.'

"He took another drink.

" 'You are staying here at the hotel?' he asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'We should have dinner together. Would you care to meet in the lobby—say, seven o'clock?'

" 'That would be pleasant,' I replied.

"He began to rise, just as the waitress arrived with four desserts and my check. I picked up the check and glanced at it.

" 'May I sign for this?' I asked her.

" 'Yes,' she answered. 'Be sure to put down your room number.'

" 'That would be 208,' I said, accepting the pen she offered me.

"Rudo froze, looking back, studying my face.

" 'Croyd…?' he said.

"I smiled.

"His face went through an amazing variety of changes, finally settling into a scowl. Then he seated himself and leaned forward.

" 'That—was—not—funny,' he told me. 'I—do—not—appreciate—such—monkeyshining.'

" 'When you get a chance like this every time you wake up, you might as well play it for a few laughs,' I said.

" 'I am not amused.'

" 'Sorry,' I said, as I attacked the flan. 'Just wanted to brighten our day.'

"He succeeded in convincing me that he had no sense of humor. But after a few minutes he was mollified, watching me eat desserts.

" 'I have located the office where we must obtain visitors' passes,' he finally said, 'for our trip to Los Alamos. It is nearby. Our names should be on the list of expected visitors. Photographs will be required. We should stop by this afternoon and take care of that.'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'How'd they get on the list?'

" 'Our man in Los Alamos sent down word that we were coming to visit him.'

" 'Handy,' I said. 'How long have we been in town?'

" 'Here? This is our fifth day. I included instructions when I induced the *dauerschlaf* that you sleep for as short a time as possible. You were out for several days in my apartment and several more in transit.'

"I nodded as I gestured at the stack of newspapers.

" 'I'd noticed the date,' I said. 'How far is it to Los Alamos?'

" 'It is about thirty-five or forty miles north of here,' he replied, 'in the mountains. I've obtained a car.'

"We strolled outside after lunch, and he steered me to the left. The area that had struck me as parklike proved to be the Plaza. We passed around it in a clockwise fashion, stopping to study the work displayed on blankets by Indian craftsmen under the *portal* of the

Palace of the Governors. Lots of silver and turquoise and some pretty pots. I bought a *bola* Rudo didn't like and wore it.

"He led me then to a one-story building nearby, where we entered through a small doorway. We came into a little suite of rooms where a woman sat at a desk.

" 'Hello,' he said. 'I am Ivan Karamazov and this is Croyd Crenson. We were told to come here to pick up our visitors' passes for Los Alamos.'

" 'Let me check the list,' she said, and she opened a drawer and withdrew a clipboard holding a stack of papers. She hummed as she checked through these. Then, 'Yes,' she said, 'I have you here.'

"She passed us some forms to fill out and told us we'd need to have our pictures taken after that. She told us the passes would be ready later in the day, or we could pick them up in the morning, since we'd said we'd be driving up the next day. We thanked her and departed.

"We walked around for a couple of hours after that, then went for a drive. Rugged, bright country. Lots of little pine trees. Big mountains. Small town. Quiet. I kind of liked the place. Wouldn't have minded spending a few weeks there.

"When it got dark we returned to the hotel and ate a big, leisurely meal, with several bottles of wine. In the dining room this time. We went back to the room afterwards and talked a while longer. Then Rudo stifled a few yawns, said something about the altitude, and decided to go to bed. I went out and spent the night walking, about the town and into the country. There's something about walking at night, when things are slow and quiet, that I've always enjoyed.

"And this place was very quiet, and very dark, once I got out from town. Sitting on a hillside later and listening to the insects and looking at the stars, I realized that I was really happy. I didn't have to do drugs anymore, I wasn't afraid of sleeping and waking up in God knows what shape, and pretty soon I'd be able to pass for normal. I felt like I wanted to sing or something, but I didn't. I just sat there and watched the night and listened to it and felt good.

"In the morning I walked back and paced the streets again and watched the town wake up. The first place I saw that opened I went in and had breakfast. Then I went back to the hotel and waited for Rudo to wake up. When he had, and had gotten himself into shape, we went downstairs and ate. We took our time over coffee, and I had a few more snacks, while we waited for the office to open for our visitors' passes.

"After we picked up the papers we headed for the car. Rudo drove, taking us over to the Taos Highway and following it northward, in the direction of the Española Valley. Somewhere along the way we passed a big rock off to the left shaped like a camel. The sun was very bright, and there were mountains to the left of us and mountains to the right. After a long while, Rudo found us a road which went off to the left, switching its way back and forth upward among orange cliffs. We went higher and higher, and there was no guard rail. The views became spectacular, the drop frightening. There were more pine trees, and big boulders, and orange buttes. At least, Rudo seemed a careful driver.

"After a long while, things leveled off and we continued on a level plane. A little later, we saw a military gate in a barbed wire fence blocking the road, a tank parked on either side of it. We slowed and came to a halt before it. One of the guards approached us, and we presented him with our passes. He checked to be sure that we matched the photos. When he was satisfied, he opened the gate and had us drive through and park. Then he placed a phone call and told us that our party would be down to meet us shortly.

"We waited, and about ten minutes later a car came down the road. It pulled up near us and parked. Its driver got out and came around to greet Rudo, calling him 'Karamazov' as they shook hands. He was a tall, pale, blond fellow. Named Scott Swensen. He clapped me on the shoulder when we were introduced, and he suggested that I ride with him and Rudo follow us in our car to the lodge.

"As we drove into the town we passed a small airport to the right. Scott gestured to the left about then and said, 'Look over there.'

"I did, and across a canyon, on a mesa, I saw a collection of green wooden shacks enclosed by a barbed wire fence. There were several armed guards at the fence's gate. Ahead, I could see where the canyon ended and one could reach the place on level land.

" 'Unimpressive bit of local architecture,' Scott said, 'eh?'

"I shrugged.

" 'Whatever gets the job done, I guess,' I replied.

" 'Right,' he answered. 'Exactly right. What you are looking at there is the DP Site.'

" 'Please translate,' I said.

" 'Stands for deuterium and plutonium," he answered. 'They use the one to derive the other. They do it in there. It's the plutonium you're interested in, I understand. Hard to come by.'

" 'What's it look like?' I asked. 'Big bars? Chunks of coal?'

" 'Naw,' he said, chuckling. 'They can only process it in minuscule quantities—a few drops in the bottom of a vial. You could pick up one of those little gray containers and stick it in your pocket—almost.'

" 'You make it sound easy,' I said.

"He laughed.

" 'I understand you're strong as all shit,' he said, 'the kind of guy who might be able to tear his way through that barbed wire fence, overpower the guards, kick his way into the storage building and help himself to a couple of plutonium containers.'

" 'Funny, I was just thinking about that.'

" 'Wouldn't work,' he said. 'You might be able to do all of that, but you'd never get away with it. You'd be stopped at the gate if you went that way. And the part of this town that doesn't have a fence abuts a wilderness. They've got mounted patrols back there with dogs. But say you got past, either way. You'd still be a hell of a distance from anything that could take you far enough away, fast enough. A massive manhunt would be mobilized very quickly. But this time it wouldn't just be a few guards. There'd be aerial surveillance as well as ground-level parties. You'd be up against squads and squads of trained men with heavy firepower. Even if you won a skirmish or two, you'd never make it. You probably would make headlines all over the world, though.'

" 'I understand that they take this stuff seriously,' I said. 'But I won't be overpowering anybody, and I won't be leaving here with anything I didn't come in with.'

" 'You've found a better way to go about it?'

" 'I intend to.'

" 'Well, I'm Security, and I don't see one.'

" 'Just get me to the Lodge. I'll take care of the rest.'

" 'And leave in the morning without it and figure a way to come back for it later?'

" 'More or less.'

"He laughed again and clapped me on the shoulder.

" 'You know, I admire that,' he said, 'and I'm real curious what you'll work out to try.'

"For all I knew, Swensen could be playing a game with Rudo, having conned him into bringing in an ace burglar to test the Security apparatus. I'd no idea how deep their relationship might run. And even if he was on our side, the fewer people who know your business the better. Suddenly, I wondered what the repercussions on aces and jokers might be if I were to mess it up and get caught. It occurred to me suddenly that it could be major.

"I laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

" 'You'll find out afterwards,' I said.

"We arrived at Fuller Lodge a little later. Rudo pulled into the parking space beside us.

" 'I'll go inside with you,' Scott said, 'see you checked in.'

" 'Thanks,' I told him, and we got out of the cars. 'You going to join us for lunch?' I asked then.

" 'I've already eaten,' he replied, 'and I've got to get back to work. Tell you what. I'll come by around six-thirty and have dinner with you.'

" 'Sounds good to me,' I said, and Rudo nodded.

"We began walking toward the Lodge.

" 'Are there any restrictions if I just want to take a walk?' I asked.

" 'No,' he answered, 'and you've got passes giving you a right to be here. Walk around. Go anywhere you want. If you get too near something that's off-limits, someone will just tell you. Oh, and don't take any pictures.'

" 'Didn't even bring a camera,' I said. 'But tell me, how would the people at an off-limits place know that I wasn't supposed to be there?'

" 'You need an access badge to enter secure facilities,' he said. 'If I were to get you one, it would be too easy to trace back to me. Sorry. My hands have to stay clean. I can't afford to leave any tracks on this matter.'

" 'No problem,' I told him.

"We entered, got checked in, and he bade us good afternoon. We went to our room then and washed up. Afterwards, we headed for the dining room for our late lunch.

"On the dining room wall, to the side of the archway, was a framed newspaper clipping with a photo. Curious, I wandered over and read it after I'd ordered.

"The photo was of a man, a scientist, named Klaus Fuchs, who had once worked here. The story, which I remembered from the previous year, told how Fuchs had given key hydrogen bomb secrets to a Soviet agent—'in the interest of world peace,' as Fuchs had put it—the actual communication of this information having taken place on the Castillo Street Bridge in Santa Fe, over which I'd passed the previous night when walking out Canyon Road way. I remembered the story as I read it. At the bottom of the piece, in red ballpoint, was written, 'Security is Everybody's Business,' and it was signed by Scott Swensen. I tried to figure how observation of that injunction could have stopped Mr. Fuchs, but I failed. Could I get this sort of press, I wondered, and be hung here?

"After a comprehensive lunch I stretched and told Rudo, 'I think I'll take a walk now.'

" 'I'll join you,' he said.

" 'You don't really want to,' I said, exerting my new Power for the first time. 'What you really want is to take a nap, since you've gotten so sleepy.'

"Immediately, he began to yawn.

" 'You're right,' he said. 'I am tired. What I really want is to go back to the room and stretch out and go to sleep.'

" 'Do it, then,' I told him. 'Do it now.'

"He got to his feet. 'Have a good walk,' he said, and he departed the dining room.

"After I'd settled up, I stepped outside and sniffed the air. A great day for walking. I headed back down Jemez Road in the direction from which we had come.

"When I came to the place where the shoulder of land continued out past the end of the canyon and led to the gate of the DP Site, I took that route. As I approached the gate two armed guards approached it from the other side.

" 'Hey, buddy,' one of them called out. 'This place is off-limits unless you're authorized personnel.'

" 'I *am* authorized personnel,' I told him. 'I'm a general—three stars. You can see them now. You can also see my badge and my pass. I'm here to make a special inspection. You want to open the gate for me so I can do that.'

" 'Just a minute, sir,' the nearer one said. 'Sorry I didn't recognize you. That bright sunlight at your back…'

"He hurried to unlock the gate.

"As I entered, he said, 'The sign-in sheet's in the first building, sir."

" 'Take me there.'

"I followed him inside and glanced at the form he placed on a desk before me. For a moment, I was tempted to sign Swensen's name. But I didn't want to get the man in trouble just to be cute. I touched the pen to the form and handed it back to the guard.

" 'There, I signed it,' I told him. 'You saw me do it.'

" 'Yes, sir,' he replied. 'Thank you. What is it you would like to inspect, sir?'

" 'The plutonium storage place,' I said. 'Take me there.'

" 'Right this way, sir.'

"He opened the door for me, followed me outside and led me to another, similar looking green shack. Two other guards passed near, casting curious glances our way. They must have assumed everything was in order since I was escorted, and they continued past us. I called them over, though.

"'This is a special inspection,' I told them. 'We need you to accompany us into the plutonium sector.'

"They followed me into the building, where the first guard led me back to a rack which held a number of small gray containers. He stopped before it and looked at it.

"'That's the stuff?' I asked him.

"'Yes, sir,' he replied.

"I studied them long and hard—size, texture, shape. Finally, I reached out and hefted one, held it a moment, replaced it. I wiped it carefully with my handkerchief then and nodded.

"'Everything is in order,' I announced. 'Let's go back outside.'

"We departed the building and I halted to study it and its position in relation to the other buildings.

"'Good,' I stated. 'The inspection is finished. You men are doing a fine job. I am going to sign out now and then I am going to leave.'

"I returned to the first building where I repeated my sign-in procedure. Then I had all of them accompany me to the gate.

"'This inspection was so secret,' I told them, 'that you are going to forget it occurred. As soon as that gate closes behind me I will begin walking. As soon as I am out of sight you will forget that you ever saw me. This inspection will not have happened. Open the gate.'

"They swung it wide before me and I stepped through and headed back to the Lodge. I picked up some magazines, went back to the room and read them while Rudo slept.

"At a little after six, I roused him and suggested he get ready for dinner. He did that, and Swensen proved punctual. We had an enjoyable meal, Swensen having a collection of jokes I hadn't heard, which kept me chuckling through dessert.

"Over coffee, he said casually, 'I guess you'll be about your business soon. Good luck.'

"'It is finished,' I said. 'I know what I need to know now. Thanks.'

"He stared at me. 'How could you have?' he asked.

"'It was easier than you might think. We'll be leaving in the morning.'

"He shook his head.

"'I'm not sure whether to believe you,' he said.

"I smiled.

"'It doesn't matter,' I said. 'Doesn't matter at all.'

"We departed the following morning, making it back to La Fonda in time for lunch. I'd explained to Rudo that I had to know the appearance and physical location of something in order to teleport it, and that I had succeeded in zeroing in on the plutonium in this fashion. Now the only thing that I needed was the ability to teleport. Not to the minimal extent I'd possessed it that day I'd walked into his office holding my water, but a bit more heavy-duty and longer-range—a thing I had had experience with in the past. Rudo seemed confident this could be achieved with another bout of *dauerschlaf.* After all, he had a perfect batting average—with Bogie, and this time around with my appearance and the hypnotic persuasive ability. So I told him to make me a teleporter, and he said 'No problem,' and we repaired to our room after dinner.

"Only one thing seemed slightly strange that afternoon. When Rudo opened a drawer to get out his medical kit with the *dauerschlaf* drugs, I caught a glimpse of a large photo lying beside it. I would have sworn it was a picture of Klaus Fuchs.

"And so, I stretched out on the bed, as he directed, and he administered the first of the drugs. As the world began to swim away, I realized that I was happy. Rudo began speaking to me softly. His voice was a distant thing…

"This one was different. There was the long dark time I always know. But it seemed that at some point I awoke briefly, did something, and went back to sleep again, visions of the gray containers dancing momentarily behind my eyes.

"When the real awakening occurred it was more than a little traumatic. Someone had hold of my shoulder and was shaking me, shouting at me.

" 'Wake up, you bastard! You're under arrest!' a large, uniformed individual was calling, as I tried to focus my eyes.

"I groaned, then, 'Awright! Awright!' I said. 'What's going on?'

"I was dragged to my feet, supported there, still trying to throw off the effects of my long sleep. I saw another cop then—much shorter, mustached—over by the dresser. He was holding one of the gray containers from the DP Site. Another still rested on the dresser.

" '…The stuff is even labeled as property of the Lab,' he was saying.

" 'Get dressed, Fuchs—or is it Crenson?' the larger one said. 'That the name you're using this time? And if you so much as breathe a suspicious breath I might get very nervous.' He patted his sidearm.

" 'I'll hold my breath,' I said, patting my pants as I donned them, to be sure the wallet was still there, if Rudo hadn't run off with the money. I'd had a lot in it, and I wanted it near.

"'Why are you arresting me?' I asked.

"'If you don't know that you're stupider than you look,' the big one answered.

"'Tell me anyhow,' I said. 'Okay? Who said I did whatever I'm supposed to have done?'

"He shrugged.

"'We had a telephone tip that you were here. He didn't give his name. We're just going to hold you for the feds. They'll be up from Albuquerque in the morning to pick you up.'

"It was dark outside the window. I could hear a car passing on the street below. They let me put on my socks and shoes before they handcuffed me. I tried to figure what might have happened. All I could see was that Rudo had set me up. He'd kept his hypnotic control—maybe by means of post-hypnotic suggestion—when I'd come out of *dauerschlaf.* Then he'd told me to teleport the plutonium containers here, as he knew I'd planned, and I'd done it. Then he'd put me back to sleep, leaving the evidence in plain sight, had cleared out, had made that phone call. The only thing I couldn't see in it was why? But if I needed any evidence of such intent—or of his twisted sense of humor—I got it as the cops hustled me out. I caught a glimpse of myself in the dresser's mirror as I passed by. I was a dead ringer for the man in the photograph, Klaus Fuchs. Security is everybody's business…

"They drove me over, though the station was only two blocks away. There, I surrendered my wallet, which they said they'd keep safe for me. I was able to determine on handing it over that my money was still in it. I hoped it would stay there. I was conducted back to a cell then and locked up. I might have made a break on the way over, or even there in the station before they locked me up. But I was still disorganized, and I wanted a little time to think.

"So all I did was watch which key it was on his chain that my jailer used to lock my cell. As he turned away, I already had hold of it with my mind. I teleported it into my right hand and put it in my pocket. I went and sat down on my bunk. I'd been in better jails and I'd been in worse. At least I knew where this one was located in relationship to everything else in the area, from my walk the other night. There was no point in escaping unless you knew where you were going and what you were going to do.

"After perhaps twenty minutes I had decided what to do. So I got up, unlocked the door, stepped out, and closed it behind me. I passed a small room from within which I heard sounds of typing. No need to look for trouble. I continued on.

"There were two cops up front. One was drinking coffee and the other was talking to someone on the telephone. I backed up beyond the doorframe and waited for the sound of the phone being cradled. The safe wherein they'd stowed my wallet was an old one, of a sort Bentley'd taught me to open in the dark.

"I moved in quickly when I heard the telephone drop into place. It took one calculated punch each to render the cops unconscious. Then I propped them in their chairs to look as if they were dozing. The safe was old and crotchety and started taking longer than I'd thought it would. I didn't want to give it another five or ten minutes, though, so I braced it with a foot and a hand and started pulling. I wasn't able to tear the door off, but I buckled it enough to be able to reach inside and get my wallet. I pocketed it then and walked out, taking a right on Washington Avenue.

"I continued along this until I came to the road to Hyde Park, where I turned and started to climb. I knew that it would eventually pass through a part of the National Forest. I could find myself a good place to hide out there before morning. And I did."

Croyd rose, stretched, returned to the cooler, came back with two beers. He set one before Hannah. He backhanded a moth.

"End of story," he said, "except for an Indian ace I met who could change the patterns on rugs into whatever was selling best, just by running his hands over them. I got away. *Now* can I buy you a drink?"

"Yes, now I'm thirsty," she said, reaching out and holding the bottle as he opened it. "But how did you get out of town?"

"I lived on roots and people's picnic remains for over a week," he said. "Then, with a short beard and wearing a pair of sunglasses I'd found, I took a chance and hiked back to town and bought a load of food and took it back to the forest with me. Lived on that until I got sleepy. Sacked out then in a rocky shelter I'd set up. When I woke a couple of weeks later I was a slim blond guy with the ability to shout at ultrasonic levels and knock people out or just make them uncomfortable, depending on how high I raised my voice and for how long. I went down to town then, got a ride out to Lamy, took a train back to New York."

"And Rudo?" she asked, sipping the beer. "Did you ever see Pan Rudo again?"

"Yes," he said. "I looked him up when I got to town. Got into his apartment building one day and picked the lock to his pad, waited there for him."

"And?"

"Of course, he didn't recognize me. He looked startled when he saw me, but he just said, 'If this is a robbery, take whatever you want. I don't need any trouble.'

"I caught hold of his shirtfront and pulled him forward till his face was within an inch of my own. At first I'd planned to kill him, but then I decided it just wasn't worth it. Hell, maybe he was even helping some of his patients.

" 'It's me, Croyd Crenson,' I said, and he must have thought I was going to kill him because he went pale as a bone. Then, 'Just tell me why you did it,' I said. 'Why'd you set me up?'

"I guess he figured he had nothing to lose if he was going to die. His lip curled then, and he said, 'You're genetic garbage, you and all of the others! I hate what you have done to the race! I wanted to disgrace the lot of you—publicly, seriously! You got lucky, though.'

"I hit him then, in the mouth, twice, and I split his lip. I threw him down on his couch and used my handkerchief to wipe the blood off my hand, but it kept coming. I realized then that I'd cut a knuckle on his tooth.

" 'I'm not going to kill you now,' I told him. 'But one of these days—Who knows?'

"I left then, and when I checked a bit later I discovered that he'd moved out. And that is the story of something that might have hurt me and led to a lot of bad will toward jokers and aces in general, what with all the HUAC paranoia that was in the air."

"Thanks," she said, taking a swallow and shutting down her recorder.

She cased the recorder and placed it in her shoulderbag, along with the clipboard.

"So much for business," Croyd said. "How's about having dinner with me?"

She slung the bag over her shoulder and moved toward the door.

"Sorry," she said. "I've got to organize a lot of notes tonight, and I'll be leaving fairly early in the morning."

"You prejudiced against guys with tails?" he said.

She removed a collapsible umbrella from her bag and opened it. She smiled then.

"No, Croyd," she said. "But I'll be keeping mine to myself. Good evening," and she turned and walked off into the shadows and the drizzle.

Croyd stood in the doorway, watching until she was out of sight. Then he turned back to the empty bar.

"Play it, Sam," he said softly, and racks of glasses began to sing. A horde of flies chose that moment to swarm about him. Cursing, he swatted at them. Their buzzing took on the sounds of a tune.

A Word from Zelazny

Croyd Crenson returns in this fourth and final tale involving psychology, in this case the villain Dr. Pan Rudo, a fictional psychiatrist who studied with Freud and at the Jungian Institute.

"I had to get Croyd into Los Alamos in 1952, not realizing till recently that it had been a closed city till '57. Fortunately, I found a woman in her '70s who'd lived there in '52, who not only told me how to do it, but gave me a physical description of the place 40 years ago, & who actually knew the name of the facility building Croyd was looking for, where it was located, & even what color it was painted. She was a friend of a friend I learned about by accident just last week. Must buy her a drink some day."[1]

A Word from George R. R. Martin

"Sadly, at least two wonderful 'untold tales' of the Sleeper were lost when Roger Zelazny passed away. I know that Roger had always intended to bring back Croyd's boyhood friend Joey Sarzanno and tell the story of the crystallized woman that Croyd kept in his closet. But he never had the chance, and now he never will. Croyd will continue to be a part of Wild Cards—Roger deliberately crafted the character so he would be easy for the other writers to use and always delighted in seeing what we did with him—but it would take an unusual amount of hubris for any of us to attempt to write either of those two stories, and it is not something I would encourage. They were Roger's stories. No one else could do 'em justice."[2]

Notes

Sigmund **Freud** developed psychoanalysis. He theorized that past events and unconscious thought strongly influence our consciousness. **Karl Jung**, also a psychiatrist and Freud's student, emphasized understanding the psyche through exploring dreams, art, mythology, world religion and philosophy.

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[1] Letter from Roger Zelazny to Kevin Andrew Murphy, 23 February 1992.

[2] *Wild Cards* Q&A, http://fantasyhotlist.blogspot.com, November 2007.

Dauershlaf is a rarely-used form of therapy which employs medication to induce a coma-like state. **Stanislaw Ulam** was a Polish-born mathematician who participated in the Manhattan Project to design the first atomic bomb. **Edward Teller**, often called the "father of the atomic bomb," was a Hungarian-born physicist who participated in the Manhattan Project. **Tom Lehrer** was an American singer-songwriter, satirist, pianist, and mathematician. In our reality, he had no involvement in the Manhattan Project, but he did research radioactivity at Los Alamos, and he lectured on mathematics.

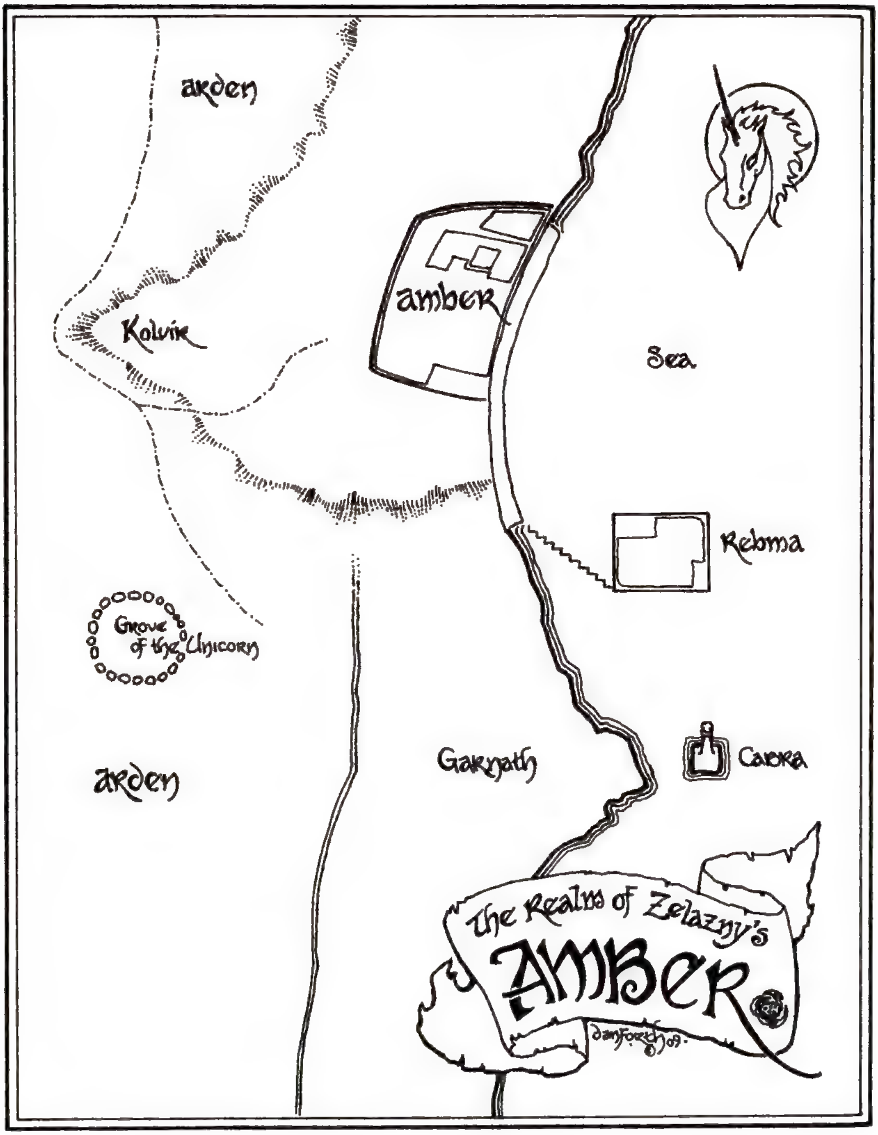
Freud's ideas on infantile sexuality and stages of development maintained that infants and children seek bodily/sexual pleasure, passing through several stages: oral (sucking), anal (defecation), phallic (sexual organs), attraction to opposite gender parent and hatred of same-sex parent (Oedipus complex), latency (period of less pronounced sexual motivation), and then resurgence of a phallic phase with puberty. **Sublimation** channels the sex drive toward socially acceptable goals in the arts, science, etc. Freud's proposed **structure of mind and personality** included the **id** (primitive mind), **ego** (rational mind), and **superego** (conscience).

Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychologist, proposed that all individuals have a **drive to achieve perfection**. Austrian psychologist **Otto Rank** proposed that trauma and separation anxiety determined personality and behavior. Jung identified eight **personality types** (extroverted and introverted, each subdivided into categories of sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling). Jung's **theory of individuation** says that a person becomes whole by an internal process of integration. Norwegian playwright **Henrik Ibsen** coined **life lie** to mean the delusions we require to avoid an unbearable reality.

Actor **Humphrey Bogart (Bogie)** played café owner **Rick** Blaine in ***Casablanca***. "**As Time Goes By**" was the one tune that Rick forbade his piano player (**Sam**) to play, because it reminded him of his lost love Ilsa. Rick says, "Play it, Sam, Play it!" (commonly misquoted as "Play it again, Sam") when he orders Sam to play the tune after all.

Zelazny lived in **Santa Fe** and visited **Los Alamos**. **Operation** or **Project Paper Clip** was the codename for the US project to extricate scientists from Germany during and after the final stages of World War II. **Bola** is a cord worn as a necktie. **Ivan Karamazov** figures in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. A **butte** is a hill with sloping sides and a flat top, rising abruptly from the surrounding plain. **Emil Julius Klaus Fuchs** was a German-born theoretical physicist who worked at Los Alamos. He was convicted of supplying the USSR with information on British and American atomic bomb research during and after WWII. **HUAC** was the House Un-American Activities Committee, an investigative body of the United States House of Representatives between 1938 and 1975.

AMBER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amber
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Grove of the Unicorn
Garnath
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The Realms of Zelazny's
Amber
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Zelazny originally sketched a map of Amber for *Hellride #1*, 1972. In that issue, Editor Ken St. Andre noted that "Liz Danforth fancied it up a bit, but this is essentially the map he sent to me when I wrote two months ago, asking for his help. I hope you like it, Mr. Z." It has been further modified/redrawn by the artist for this volume of *The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny.*

PROLOG TO *TRUMPS OF DOOM*

Trumps of Doom, Underwood-Miller edition [as "Prolog"] 1985.
§ *Amber*

He started out walking, into the dim labyrinth. There seemed to be a faint tune in the air…

It was almost too easy. A turning, a twisting, a doubling back…

And then he faced a rough, slanted wall, looked up and saw the shaft. He commenced climbing.

It was no longer easy. A swaying sensation began—faint, then distinct—as if he were mounting into the uppermost branches of a tall tree. His way brightened and then dimmed, repeatedly, in no perceptible pattern. After a time, his eyes ached. Images doubled, wavered…

When the way grew suddenly level he doubted his vision, till his extended hand assured him that there was indeed a choice of passages.

He leaned and moved his head into each of these. The faint musical sound seemed slightly louder in the one to the left, and he followed it. Of that, at least, he was certain.

Now his way rose and fell. He climbed up, he climbed down. The brightening and dimming continued, only now the brightness was brighter and the dimness dimmer.

And the sensations of external movement had not abated. The floor of the tunnel seemed to ripple beneath his feet, the walls and roof to contract and expand. He stumbled, caught himself. Stumbled again…

At the next turning the sounds grew slightly louder, and he realized that they were not a tune, but rather a totally random concatenation of noises.

He climbed. He descended. The passageway shrank, and finally he crawled.

The sensations of movement increased. At times he seemed to be spinning; other times, it felt as if he were falling into an enormous abyss.

The flashes of light now drove nails of pain into his skull. He began to hallucinate. Faces and figures. Flames. Or were they hallucinations?

He felt the first faint pulsation upon his left wrist…

How long had he been moving? His clothes were already in tatters and he bled, painlessly, from a dozen scrapes and lacerations.

He descended a well and emerged somehow upward onto a floor. Mad laughter rang about him, ceasing only when he realized it to be his own.

The sounds grew even louder, until it felt as if he negotiated a gallery of demonic bells—wild, out of phase, their vibrations beating against him.

Thinking became painful. He knew that he must not stop, that he must not turn back, that he must not take any of the lesser turnings where the sounds came softer. Any of these courses would prove fatal. He reduced this to one imperative: Continue.

Again, a pulsing at his wrist, and a faint, slow movement.

He gritted his teeth when he saw that he must climb once more, for his limbs had grown heavy. Each movement seemed as if it were performed underwater—slowly, requiring more than normal effort.

A screen of smoke offered frightening resistance. He drove himself against it for an age before he passed through and felt his movements become easy once again. Six times this occurred, and each time the pressure against him was greater.

When he crawled out, drooling and dripping blood, on the other side of the chamber from which he had entered, his eyes darted wildly and could not fix upon the small, dark figure which stood before him.

"You are a fool," it told him.

It took some time for the words to register, and when they did he lacked the strength with which to reply.

"A lucky fool," it went on, darkness flowing about it like wings. (Or were they really wings?) "I had not judged you ready to essay the Logrus for a long while yet."

He closed his eyes against this speaker, and an image of the route he had followed danced within his mind's seeing, like a bright, torn web folding in a breeze.

"…And a fool not to have borne a blade and so enchanted it… or a mirror, a chalice, or a wand to brace your magic. No, all I see is a piece of rope. You should have waited, for more instruction, for greater strength. What say you?"

He raised himself from the floor, and a mad light danced within his eyes. "It was time," he said. "I was ready."

"And a cord! What a half-ass—Uck!"

The cord, glowing now, tightened about his throat.

When the other released it, the dark one coughed and nodded.

"Perhaps—you knew—what you were doing—on that count…" it muttered. "Is it really time? You will be leaving?"

"Yes."

A dark cloak fell upon his shoulders. He heard the splash of water within a flask.

"Here."

As he drank, the cord wrapped itself about his wrist and vanished.

"Thanks, Uncle," he said, after several swallows.

The dark figure shook its head.

"Impulsive," it said. "Just like your father."

A Word from Zelazny

In response to "requests by fans, pressure from publishers, new story ideas," Zelazny returned to Amber in 1985 with *Trumps of Doom*. He created new characters because "I pretty much told the story I had wanted to tell in the first series. I had wanted to return to that particular world, but I wanted to tell a totally different story. Also this would require a different viewpoint. Also, it's interesting to deal with similar situations from a different character's standpoint… I still have more stories I want to tell about the Amber universe. I had a rest, the characters had a rest, and I thought it would be a good time to go back and continue."[1]

The second series features Corwin's son Merlin. Announced as a trilogy, it eventually comprised five books, paralleling Corwin's series, originally a trilogy that grew to five. "I just finished a fifty-some thousand-word tale a week ago. *Nine Princes in Amber*, 'tis called. It's to be the first in a trilogy, re which the fans seem already enthusiastic, subsequent to a few readings I've given… It ends with a sort of cliff-hanger, but so did *A Princess of Mars* and look what happened there. I've already figured out the sequel, *The Guns of Avalon*, and have some strong notions regarding the third—*The Courts of Chaos*. More on these later, though."[2]

Notes

Written specifically for the signed, limited edition of *Trumps of Doom* from Underwood-Miller, this prolog does not appear in the regular hardcover or paperback versions of the novel.

Concatenation means linked together as in a chain.

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[1] *Xignals*, XVI, Feb/Mar 1986.

[2] Letter from Zelazny to Larry Ashmead, Doubleday, February 13, 1967.

THE ROAD TO AMBER

Nine Princes in Amber Book 1 of 3, DC Comics 1996.
§ *Amber*

Amber has occupied a big piece of my writing time over the years—ten books of it—and I want to say things about it here that will not give away the plot to those who are about to visit there for the first time. So I have to talk about the books without talking about what happens in the books. Okay. A challenge… One day I found myself walking in a part of Baltimore I had never visited before. Precisely where it was, or why I was there, I no longer recall. It was a sunny autumn day, though, a bit brisk, and I was passing down a narrow street lined with shops. I came to a corner and turned right. Immediately, I found myself on a totally different sort of street—residential, tree-lined, rather quaint. I had not anticipated the sudden shift and was somewhat surprised by the contrast. I passed along the street, however, and turned left at the next corner. With almost perfect timing, the sun was covered by a cloud as I turned, showing me a dark, alleylike street with a 19th-century feeling to it. Another turn, and there were open lots, houses set farther back from the road; and the sun came out again. It felt as if I were in the country rather than the city. I forget where I went after that, what I did, or how I got back. But the succession of contrasting prospects was already producing an effect in that place in my mind where stories occur. What form it would take, I had no idea at the time. It did not occur to me till later, when I was writing them, that this was a piece with the shadow walk and the hellride, two of the Amberites' means of passing through realities.

The Trumps are another. For several years I'd been fascinated by the art of playing cards. I began collecting them—odd decks, old decks, Tarots. I found them in junk shops, antique stores, hobby shops. I read books on them. What they were all doing in that special place in my mind is hard to say. But when the time came and Corwin searched Flora's study, looking for anything that might give him a clue concerning his past, they were there, waiting for just that moment, and they had to be the right thing. And when Flora mentioned Amber, I saw it, I suddenly knew what it was, what it had to be.

Yes, I started the story without knowing everything in it. I did this because I could feel that the story was all there, somewhere, just waiting for the proper chords to be struck to bring it forth. I do not think that it is such bits and pieces that turn themselves into a story. Rather, I feel that the story finds the bits and pieces it needs to tell itself. My job as a writer was actually being done as I walked those streets, studied those cards. And every time I look at something and see it in a new way, feeling some odd connection with everything else, I am writing—though nothing may appear on paper for years. I believe that one may train oneself to write this way all the time—and that things will surface when they're needed. Whatever, I've always listened to that feeling that tells me when a story is there.

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Amber… Flora said it, and I saw the great city on the mountain, the palace at its top. Where the name came from and what sparked that special vision, I can't say. When a story writes itself that way, though, it is a very good sign: It shows me that the mental machinery is working smoothly back in the story-making place; it tells me that the story is going to be fun to write and will probably be well received. *Nine Princes in Amber* almost told itself. I just wrote it down, with all the pleasure of someone reading for enjoyment, discovering what was happening as I went along.

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Julian, Brand, Fiona, Benedict, Eric, Random, Llewella, Gérard, Deirdre, Flora, Bleys, Caine—as I described each one for the first time, there in Flora's study, it was like meeting someone I already knew. I didn't feel as if I were creating characters; it was more like remembering people I hadn't thought of in a long while. In fact, it seemed more like what Corwin had to be feeling, having memories slowly returning to him. I think this is how it always is for a writer when things are going perfectly. The characters, the events, the settings were there all along—encountered not only on strange walks or the faces of playing cards, but at banks, shopping malls, and in the windows of passing cars. The real writing occurs as we go about our business, because we've learned to study whatever passes. Later on, it's just a matter of remembering essences and hitting keys. Of course, what happens between the looking and feeling and the remembering and writing is magic. For that place in the mind where the essences are extracted, the experiences transformed, is a place of shadow. What comes out is not really the same as what goes in.

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Thus Amber was born of chaos, transformed in shadow, and kissed to wakefulness by the typewriter's keys after all the work was done.

Notes

In 1996, DC Comics published *Nine Princes in Amber* as a three-part comic, followed by *The Guns of Avalon*. The plan was to adapt all ten Amber novels, but Zelazny's death before the first book appeared stalled the project. (Another publisher, Dabel Brothers, announced plans to publish the Amber series with new adaptations by Trent Zelazny and developed previews of the artwork. However, Dabel Brothers experienced financial difficulties and the project was eventually canceled.) This essay appeared in Part One of *Nine Princes in Amber*.

THE GREAT AMBER QUESTIONNAIRE

Hellride #3, January 28, 1978 (modified).

1. Can secondary characters, for example Lord Rein, use Trumps to contact the people depicted thereon? Are the minor lords represented in the Minor Arcana?

   RZ: Yes, secondary characters can use the Trumps.

2. What are Julian's colors? Fiona's?

   RZ: Julian: White and red. Fiona: Green and brown.

3. Exactly how many brothers and sisters were there before Osric and Finndo?

   RZ: I have to leave this one open, but there were at least two others.

4. What is the technological level of Amber; why does it seem semi-medieval? Does electricity work in Amber? Along the same lines, why are there no apparent steam-powered devices (weapons or engines), nor devices run on compressed air or its like?

   RZ: Technological level: Yes, on steam-powered devices. But they have never figured in the narrative. [No, on electricity, just as we use it. It may be possible, but has never been employed, with variant units of conductance, resistance, etc. Must be classified as unknown at this point.]

5. What exactly are the powers of the redheads; what are their relative strengths and weaknesses in relation especially to each other?

   RZ: The redheads have greater natural abilities with magic, just as some people have perfect pitch. Brand and Fiona were about equal in ability, till Brand gained extra powers through his dealings with Chaos. Bleys was lazier and did not work to develop his to the extent Brand and Fiona did.

6. Do Shadow-Ambers have Shadow-Patterns and, by the same token, Shadow-Princes with any capabilities over Shadow?

   RZ: Yes, there are Shadow Ambers with Shadow Patterns, but these are imperfect and the powers of the Shadow Amberites, while real, are also imperfect and are limited to only a few adjacent shadows.

7. How close can you drive a car to Amber? How close could you bring, say, a nuclear-powered submarine?

   RZ: A car coming from a high tech shadow could be driven to within a few kilometers of Kolvir, its performance falling off as it approached. —The matter of a nuclear-powered submarine has not yet arisen, but the electrical components of the power system and missile systems would fail. There is also the matter of the point of penetration from Shadow into the world of Amber. The car bearing Corwin and Random in the first book would have begun failing much sooner had it shifted in at a point farther from Amber. Things carry their own physical laws—from their points of origin—with them, briefly, before the physical laws of Amber swamp them. [Ditto, and vice versa, for magical laws, in certain places.] You can't shift in upon Amber itself, though.

8. To what extent is Moire a Shadow of Oberon, and the nobility of Rebma a reflection of the royal family?

   RZ: No, no reflection of the Amberites in Rebma. Only the cities, not the people, are mirrored. Rebma is populated by a sea race which settled in it ages before.

9. Does the blood of Amberites affect secondary Patterns? Are there more Patterns in actual existence than those in the Primal, in Amber, Rebma, Tir-na Nog'th, and in the Jewel? How does the three-dimensional Jewel-Pattern compare with the other two-dimensional ones? Are all possible "Patterns" contained in the three dimensions vs. the laid-out two-dimensional versions?

   RZ: No, the blood of Amberites does not affect secondary Patterns. Only the primal one. The Patterns given in the series are the only ones known until book five, when Corwin uses the Jewel to create a second primal Pattern. Two such cannot exist in the same universe, though, and a new order of existence is split off as a result. Each 2-D version is slightly different, though effective. The Jewel is the matrix.

10. Corwin says at one point that there is a story behind Grayswandir. What is this story? What is the magical nature of Grayswandir? Of Bleys' sword? Both these blades carry portions of the Pattern upon them; why, how, when, where, and like that? What is the effect? What is the magic, if any, of Julian's armor?

    RZ: I will have to reserve the answers to all these questions concerning the magical weapons, against the possibility of another book in which they might figure.

11. The creatures out of Shadow that chased Random into *Nine Princes in Amber*… To what degree do these creatures shift Shadow around the will of the Family? (Random returns to the john, and Flora's maid goes to answer the door).

12. Can one manipulate Shadow without having to move?

    RZ: [re 11 & 12] Not in Amber itself, but in most other places, small probabilities can be manipulated within the environment of one having power over Shadow. This is limited, however, as it is much more fatiguing than simply passing through Shadow oneself. If two persons were trying it for conflicting ends, it would be more of a conflict of ingenuity than one of will, and more direct means would generally be employed.

13. To what degree is language a function of Shadow—as one travels through Shadow, do you "know" the primary language of that Shadow?

    RZ: The primary language of a Shadow world is not always known to the Amberites, though they generally include a particular language with which they are familiar—or some variation thereof—in their mental specifications, when seeking something in Shadow.

14. Magic: to what degree does it work? As opposed to the manipulation of Shadow by the Family, and alteration of probabilities.

    RZ: Magic works particularly well within the world of Amber and its adjacent shadows. Kolvir itself bears an intentional dampening effect for magic, though, laid upon it by Oberon, to close that avenue for assassination attempts. It is not entirely effective, however, and small effects can be produced.

15. Who is Llewella's mother?

    RZ: Moire's younger sister, the late lady Fraye.

16. Why does it run that Moire is green, Llewella is green, but neither Martin nor Vialle seem to be? How is this generalized to all Rebmans?

    RZ: See #8. A separate sea race.

17. Whose body is in the glass serpent at Brand's tower?

    RZ: Some unfortunate person who got too close.

18. What happened to Corwin's original Avalon? Why, in the infinity of Shadows, does it not still exist?

    RZ: It was destroyed. Only its imperfect image can now be found.

19. Sending things through Shadow, and summoning them out of it: twice Grayswandir is summoned through; the *Butterfly* is sent back to Cabra, birds of desire fly, once an arrow of desire is shot. How does this compare with the creation of Corwin's bird of his blood (if there is comparison)?

    RZ: They are all similar magical feats, bearing their own rules within them as they pass through Shadow.

20. Pursuit: when Corwin is fleeing Julian, he says that Julian "or a Shadow of him" will continue to follow. Just how far do things like that extend? What degree of congruence?

    RZ: He is saying that Julian might follow him or arrange for a shadow pursuer. Even a non-Amberite can follow one with power over Shadow if he is sufficiently quick and tenacious. There is a brief "wake" behind a Shadow-traveler which leaves the way open for a little while. Amberites are sensitive to it and can track one of their fellows more readily. —"Julian's shadow" would not be pursuing as a matter of course. Julian could produce this state of affairs with sufficient effort, along the lines suggested in #11 and #12.

21. On p. 26 in *Sign of the Unicorn*: is Random pulling the rock out of a nearby Shadow to smear the glass snake, or is he moving the whole mess to a Shadow where it is more likely to happen?

    RZ: Even Random doesn't know for sure.

22. Some Chaos creatures float when dead, some burn. Why?

    RZ: The guardians in the tower and the creatures pursuing Random in the first book do not harken from the Courts themselves. They are mere tools, but tools from a place in Shadow where the inhabitants possess the ability to traverse Shadow to some degree. Only natives of the Courts burn when injured—actually a quick means of healing lesser wounds. Had Random died in the tower, his body would have floated, also. It was a property of the place, not the persons.

23. How was Brand being held in the tower? Chained to the wall seemed to be enough, but that seems insufficient in view of his powers.

    RZ: Again, properties of the place. It was selected as his prison because it blocked most of his magical abilities. —Also, though, he was placed under a spell before being transported there, and his food and water were drugged.

24. Is Dworkin really mad, or is it all an act?

    RZ: Dworkin was partly mad—a condition reflecting the damaged Pattern itself.

25. What type of ships make up the merchant fleet and military fleet of Amber? What nature of armament?

    RZ: I want to pass on this one, too, for the same reason as in #10.

26. How does one set up defenses outside one's own Shadow?—along the lines of the defenses around Amber set up by Eric which prevented Flora from walking to Amber, and inconvenienced Corwin and Random in *Nine Princes*.

    RZ: Magic, basically acting as a circle on a polar graph about the point to be defended. One could Trump through, as if it were not there, if someone would cooperate. Otherwise, it must be penetrated, physically or magically—involving the taking of some risks.

27. How many people (or troops) can move through Trump contact? As riders and their mounts were brought through. Is it significantly more effort?

    RZ: A great number. As many as can be passed through while two persons maintain contact—in which they are limited only by mental fatigue.

28. Is anyone you know of working on a Concordance of the Amber books?

    RZ: Not to my knowledge.

29. There is a copy of the Jewel of Judgment in Rebma. What powers are inherent in that jewel? Can it be attuned by walking the Pattern with it? Can it be used to control weather in Rebma?

    RZ: There is no copy of the Jewel in Rebma. It preceded Amber itself in existence and is not reflected.

Notes

Ken St. Andre, creator of the first Amber role-playing game and editor of *Hellride,* wrote Zelazny to ask him a series of questions about Amber. "This questionnaire will show you that the players are not taking this game or your creation of Amber lightly… I don't know if you will answer all of these, but some of them are obviously more important than others. Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27!!! seem the most vital to me."[1]

Zelazny responded, noting, "this seems to cover everything."[2] An edited version of the questions and answers appeared as "The Great Amber Questionnaire" in *Hellride* #3, published January 28, 1978. Reproduced here are St. Andre's unedited questions and Zelazny's answers, taken from their archived correspondence.

Zelazny answered these questions in the year after he completed *The Courts of Chaos.* Some of his answers (Julian's and Fiona's colors; Llewella's mother) contradict statements in later essays ("Amber and the Amberites," *The Visual Guide to Castle Amber*) and in the Merlin novels. This implies that he did not keep notes but replied upon memory to keep the details of Amber straight.

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[1] Letter from Ken St. Andre to Roger Zelazny, January 13, 1978.

[2] Letter from Roger Zelazny to Ken St. Andre, January 21, 1978.

A SECRET OF AMBER

by Roger Zelazny and *Ed Greenwood*

Amberzine #12–15, March 2005. (written 1977–1992)
§ *Amber*

She raised an eyebrow. "I thought better of you, brother. It seems I was wrong."

I sipped my wine. "It seems you were. Again."

Silence. She raised the other brow.

I gave her more silence.

"Well, Corwin?"

"Disappointment," I observed, over the rim of my glass, "is a beast that runs in packs."

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"Whereas wit is a bird that eludes the hand of rather too many princes."

I shrugged. "Your disapproval concerns me even less than usual, Fi. All things considered."

She tossed her head, red hair like a fall of flame. "Yet perhaps it should. All things considered."

I did things with my own eyebrows, emptied my glass, swung my boots down from the table, and headed for the door.

She chuckled, behind me.

I stopped, refrained from turning, and waited. Fiona could never resist showing the rest of us that she was a step ahead. Or pretending to be.

"You are wearing your blade," she said. "Good."

I went out, uttering no clever comments. With at least three murderous ghosts stalking Castle Amber, the time for such things was past.

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Lightning struck Kolvir, somewhere outside the windows, as I made my way back to my room. I saw no one.

There was a fire going on the grate, and everything was as I had left it. Which meant drink of my choosing was handy. I chose generously.

Full of good spirits, I cracked a better book and waited for whatever spirits might come.

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It was very late, or rather early, before one of the walls opened in a place where it should not have done, and something that was both silver and shadow joined me.

Grayswandir felt good in my hand as I put down what I was finished drinking anyway, and waited.

Patience, they say, is chiefly a virtue for statues, but I'd made more than my share of mistakes, thus far, and blood is hell to get out of good rugs.

Came a whisper, out of darkness: "Corwin. Is it time?"

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So it knew me. You have the advantage, and all that. Time for what?

"No," I said very firmly. "Go away."

A stirring of silver, rising before me. "I fear not, Prince of Amber. I must have the blood I came for." The whisper was close, and hungry, and utterly unfamiliar.

I stepped back, slicing the air before me with my blade. "Suppose you tell me why. And your name, while you're at it."

The reply was a chuckle that did seem familiar, somehow, in the moment before the shadows boiled up into a half a dozen stabbing, slashing blades, and Grayswandir rang in protest, sparks flying around me.

I considered some obscenities and then discarded them all.

Fiona had been ahead of me. Again.

"The Fool Prince," she'd called me once. And would again, if I was lucky enough in these next few panting minutes. Or swift enough.

Lightning struck the Castle, somewhere nearby. Which itself should not have happened, what with the enchantments—

A swordpoint melted back into shadow, and then another, and my blade bit into nothing beyond.

A nothing that spilled silver out across my floor, scorching the rugs with sudden plumes of smoke.

"Prince of Amber!" my visitor hissed in pain. "You fight well!"

I struck again.

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And shadows fled before me, and I was alone.

My book was on the floor, blackened. Damn. I watched lightning flicker and wondered if I would ever know what I fought, or why. Family politics seemed as tiresome as ever.

Three ghosts, Benedict had said, and had been on the brink of saying more ere his face had smoothed and he'd turned away. Which meant he'd recognized the one he'd seen.

So had the lamplighter, before the ghost that slew him caught up with him and burned his skull bare, from within.

Coln had died, before that, and one of the cooks. Seven maids, or more by now, since.

Then they'd started on us. Flora had almost fallen to one, and then Julian. Almost.

We're tough meat, we of Amber.

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My wall was as solid as ever, so I got out a lantern, and went looking for trouble. Something Princes of Amber never do, according to one of Droppa's little ditties.

Ho ho.

"Do not be too hasty," Dad had told me once, when I'd broken something in a rage at Eric. But then, a lot had changed since Dad's disappearance.

A lot, indeed. I was descending a stair when shadows and silver spun up again. Below me and above me, to the accompaniment of ghostly laughter.

I sighed. It was going to be one of those nights.

Notes

Zelazny and Ed Greenwood co-wrote this fragment. In 1977 Greenwood wrote the first section on a bookmark he then placed in his father's copy of *Nine Princes in Amber.* When asked to sign Greenwood's book at a 1979 convention, Zelazny read the bookmark, realized that Fiona and Corwin were talking, and added the next few sentences. Greenwood and Zelazny wrote alternating passages intermittently over the next fifteen years whenever they met at conventions. After they wrote the last two sections in 1992, Greenwood expected Zelazny to continue the story at a convention in summer 1995—but Zelazny died that June. This fragment is Zelany's only Amber collaboration, and it became his last original piece of Amber fiction published when it finally appeared in 2005. In 1993, a year after his last contribution to "A Secret of Amber," Zelazny wrote the first of five linked Amber short stories, "The Salesman's Tale."

THE SALESMAN'S TALE

Amberzine #6, February 1994.
§ *Amber*

Glad I'd planned on leaving Merlin in the Crystal Cave for a long while. Glad he didn't stay the entire time.

As I interrupted our trumped conversation by kicking over my glass of iced tea and shouting "Shit! I spilled it—" I turned over the Trump of Doom in my good hand.

Junkyard Forest. Nice sketch, that. Though it didn't matter what it depicted, which is why I'd had Merlin fan the cards face down and had drawn one at random. That was for show, to confuse the Pattern. All of them led to places within spitting distance of the Crystal Cave—which had been the real reason for their existence in the first place. Their only purpose had been to draw Merlin into the Cave's orbit, at which point a blue crystal warning system was to have alerted me. The plan was for me to get there in a hurry and find a way to make him a prisoner. Unfortunately, I hadn't gotten the message when he'd drawn the Sphinx to escape from mom. Her neurotoxins had canceled a necessary trigger signal from his nervous system—just one of the many ways she's messed up my plans without half-trying. Didn't matter, though, in the long run. I got Merlin there, anyway. Only…everything changed after that.

"Luke! You fool!" The Pattern's message blasted through me like the closing number at a rock concert.

But the Junkyard Forest had already come clear, and I was trumping out, before the Pattern realized that tea rather than my blood was flowing upon it.

I rose to my feet as the Pattern faded, and I moved forward amid the rusty sawblade bushes, the twisted girder trees, the gaily colored beds of broken bottles. I began to run, blood spilling from the slashed palm of my left hand. I didn't even take the time to bind it. Once the Pattern recovered from its shock and discovered itself undamaged, it was going to begin scanning Shadow for me, for the others. They'd be safe within the ambit of the other Pattern, and that left me. The walls of the Crystal Cave had the effect of blocking every paraphysical phenomenon I'd been able to test them for, and I'd a hunch they'd screen me from the Pattern's scrutiny as well. It was just a matter of my getting there before it shadow-shuffled this far.

I increased my pace. I'd stayed in shape. I could run. Past rusting cars and swirls of bedsprings, broken tiles, shattered crates… Down alleys of ashes, up trails of bottlecaps and pulltabs… Alert. Waiting. Waiting for the world to spin and waver, to hear the voice of the Pattern announce, "Gotcha!"

I rounded a bend and caught a glimpse of blue in the distance. The Junkyard Forest—result of an ancient Shadow storm—ended abruptly as I entered upon a downward slope, to be succeeded within paces by a wood of the more normal variety.

Here, I heard a few birdcalls as I passed, and the humming of insects, above the steady striking of my feet upon the earth. The sky was overcast, and I could tell nothing of temperature or wind because of my activity. The shimmering mound of blue grew larger. I maintained my pace. By *now*, the others should be safe, if they'd made it at all. Hell! By now they should be well out of harm's way. Just a little while in this time-stream was a much longer time back on the main drag. They could be sitting around eating and joking by now. Even napping. I bit back a curse to save breath. That also meant that the Pattern could have been searching for even longer than it seemed…

Larger, even larger now, the blue ridge. I decided to see how well my finishing spurt had held up, and I went into high gear and held it there.

The earth and air were vibrated by what seemed a rumble of thunder. It could be a reaction of the irate design on having finally located me. I could also just be a rumble of thunder.

I kept pumping, and moments later, it seemed, I was braking so as not to smash up against that crystal base. No lightning bolts yet, and I scrambled for hand and toeholds—never having tried climbing this face of it before—as my lungs worked like a bellows and a light rain began to fall, mingling with a layer of my perspiration. I left bloody smears on the stone, but that should soon wash away.

Achieving the summit, I rushed to its opening on all fours and entered feet first, hanging, then dropping into the dark interior despite the presence of a ladder. Haste was all. Not until I stood within that shadowy blueness, still puffing, did I feel at all safe. As soon as I caught my breath I allowed myself to laugh. I had done it. I had escaped the Pattern.

I walked about the chamber beating upon my thighs and slapping the walls. A victory such as this tasted good, and I would not let it pass unmarked. I hustled back to the larder, located a bottle of wine, opened it, and took a drink. Then I repaired to a side cavern which still contained a sleeping bag, seated myself upon it, and continued to chuckle as I reenacted in my mind our experience there at the primal Pattern. My lady Nayda had been so magnificent. So had Merlin, for that matter. Now…

I wondered whether the Pattern really held grudges. That is, how long would it be before it was safe to me to go forth without feeling in imminent peril?

No real way to tell. Unfortunate. Still, the Pattern must have too much to occupy it to behave in any manner similar to those people who hung about in its vicinity—*i.e.,* Amberites. Mustn't it? I took another drink. I might be here for a long time.

I would use a spell to alter my appearance, I decided. When I left here I would have dark hair and a beard (over the beginnings of a real beard), gray eyes, a straight nose, higher cheekbones, and a smaller chin. I would seem taller and a lot thinner. I would switch from my usual bright ones to dark garments. Not just some light, cosmetic spell either. It would have to be a strong one, with depth and substance to it.

Musing upon this, I got up and went in search of food. I found some tinned beef and biscuits, and I used a small spell to heat a can of soup. No, that was not a violation of the physical laws of the place. The crystal walls block sendings in and out, but my spells came in with me and operated as normal in the interior.

Eating, I thought again of Nayda, of Merlin, and of Coral. Whatever was happening to them—good or bad—time was favoring them in getting it done. Even if I stayed here for but a short while developments back home would be incommensurate with time's apparent lapse here. And what kind of time did the Pattern really keep? All of them, I supposed—that is to say, its own—but I also felt it to be especially keyed to the mainline of its flow in Amber. In fact, I was almost sure of it, since that's where the action was. So if I wanted to be back in action quickly I should just stay here long enough for my hand to heal.

But really, how badly could the Pattern want me? How much would I actually matter to it? What was I in its view? King of a minor Golden Circle realm. Assassin of one Prince of Amber. Son of the man who had once sought to destroy it… I winced at that, but reflected that the Pattern had let me live my entire life up to now without reprisal for dad's actions. And my part in the current business had been minimal. Coral had seemed its main concern, and then Merlin. Perhaps I was being ultra-cautious. Likely, it had dismissed me from its main considerations the moment I had vanished. Still, I wasn't going to step out of here without that disguise.

I finished eating and sipped at the wine. And when I did step out? What exactly would I be about then? Numerous possibilities tumbled through my mind. I also began yawning and the sleeping bag looked very good. Lightning flashed, blue wave through the walls. Then the thunder came, like surf. Tomorrow then. Tomorrow I would plan…

I crawled inside and got comfortable. In a moment, I was gone.

I've no idea how long I slept. On rising, I made the rounds to establish a security habit, ran through a vigorous routine of exercises, cleaned myself up, then ate a leisurely breakfast. I felt better than I had the day before, and my hand had already commenced healing.

Then I sat and stared at the wall, probably for hours. What was my best course of action?

I could rush back to Kashfa and the kingship, I could hunt after my friends, I could simply go underground, lie low, and investigate until I learned what was going on. It was a question of priorities. What was the most important thing I could do for everybody concerned? I thought about it till lunchtime and then I ate again.

Afterwards, I took up my small sketchpad and a pencil and I began recalling a certain lady, feature by feature. I fiddled with it all afternoon, to pass the time, though I knew I had her right. When I knocked off for dinner the next day's activities had already taken shape in my mind.

The next morning my injury was considerably diminished, and I conjured myself a mirror upon a smooth surface of the wall. Using an oil lamp so as not to waste an illumination spell, I conjured that tall, dark, lean figure upon my own form, cast those aquiline features upon my own—complete with beard—and I looked upon my work and saw that it was good. I transformed the appearance of my garments then, also, to keep the new me company—this latter a single spell. I'd have to fetch real garments as soon as I could. No use wasting a high-powered working on something that trivial. I did this all first thing, because I'd wanted to wear the guise all day, let it soak in, see whether there were any hidden weaknesses to my working. Then I wanted to sleep in it, for the same reason.

That afternoon I took up the sketchpad again. I studied my previous day's work, then turned to a fresh page and executed a Trump. It felt exactly right.

The next morning, following the usual routine, I reviewed myself in the mirror again, was satisfied, and mounted the ladder to emerge from the cave. It was a damp, cool morning with a few blue breaks in the cloud cover high overhead. Could rain again. But what the hell did I care? I was on my way out.

I reached for my pad, then paused. I was reminded of other Trumps I had dealt with over the years, and of something else. I withdrew my deck of cards. Uncasing them, I moved slowly through until I came to the sad one—dad's. I had kept his card for sentiment's sake, not utility. He looked just as I remembered him, but I hadn't sought it for purposes of reminiscence. It was because of the item he wore at his side.

I focused on Werewindle, by all accounts a magical blade, in some way related to Corwin's Grayswandir. And I recalled Merlin's telling me how his father had summoned Grayswandir to him in Shadow, following his escape from the dungeons of Amber. There was some special affinity between him and that weapon. I wondered. Now that the pace had quickened and new adventures were looming, it would probably be advisable to face things prepared with the appropriate steel. Though dad was dead, Werewindle was somehow alive. Though I could not reach my father, might I somehow reach his blade, its whereabouts, of last report, somewhere in the Courts of Chaos?

I focused my attention upon it, calling it with my mind. It seemed that I felt something, and when I touched it the spot it occupied on the card seemed to be growing cold. I reached. Farther. Harder.

And then there was clarity and nearness and the feeling of a cold, alien intelligence regarding me.

"Werewindle," I said softly.

If there can be the sound of an echo in the absence of a prior sound this is what I heard.

"Son of Brand," came a reverberation.

"Call me Luke."

There was silence. Then, "Luke," came the vibration.

I reached forward, caught hold of it, and drew it toward me. The scabbard came with it. I drew back.

I held it in my hands then and I drew it. It flowed like molten gold around the design it wore. I raised it, extended it, executed a cut. It felt right. It felt perfect. It felt as if enormous power lay behind its every movement.

"Thanks," I said, and the echo of laughter came and went.

I raised my pad and opened it to the appropriate page, hoping it was a good time to make the call. I regarded the lady's delicate features, her unfocused gaze that somehow indicated the breadth and depth of her vision. After a few moments, the page grew cold beneath my fingertips, and my drawing took on a 3-dimensional quality, seemed faintly to stir.

"Yes?" came her voice.

"Your Highness," I said. "However you may perceive these things, I want you to know that I have intentionally altered my appearance. I was hoping that—"

"Luke," she said, "of course I recognize you—your own Majesty now," her gaze still unfocused. "You are troubled."

"Indeed I am."

"You wish to come through?"

"If it is appropriate and convenient."

"Certainly."

She extended her hand. I reached forward, taking it lightly in my own, as her studio came clear, banishing gray skies and crystal hill. I took a step toward her and I was there.

Immediately, I dropped to my knees, unclasped my swordbelt and offered her my blade. In the distance, I could hear sounds of hammering and sawing.

"Rise," she said, touching my shoulder. "Come and be seated. Have a cup of tea with me."

I got to my feet and followed her to a table in the corner. She took off her dusty apron and hung it on a peg on the wall. As she prepared the tea I regarded the small army of statues which lined one wall and bivouacked in random cluster about the enormous room—large, small, realistic, impressionistic, beautiful, grotesque. She worked mainly in clay, though a few smaller ones were of stone; and there were furnaces at the room's far end, though these were cold now. Several metal mobiles of unusual shape were suspended from ceiling beams.

When she joined me again she reached out and touched my left hand, locating the ring she had given me.

"Yes, I value the Queen's protection," I said.

"Even though you are now a monarch yourself from a country on friendly terms with us?"

"Even so," I said. "So much so, in fact, that I wish to reciprocate in part."

"Oh?"

"I'm not at all certain that Amber is aware of recent events to which I have been party or of which I have knowledge, which may affect her welfare. That is, unless Merlin has been in touch recently."

"Merlin has not been in touch," she said. "If you have information vital to the realm, though, perhaps you ought to give it to Random direct. He's not here just now, but I could reach him for you via Trump."

"No," I said. "I know he doesn't like me at all or trust me, as his brother's killer and a friend of the man who has sworn to destroy Amber. I am sure he would love to see me deposed and some puppet on the throne of Kashfa. I suppose I must have things out with him one day, but this isn't the day. I've too much else going on just now. But the information transcends local politics. It involves Amber and the Courts of Chaos, the Pattern and the Logrus, the death of Swayvill and Merlin's possible succession to the throne in the Courts—"

"You're serious!"

"You bet. I know he'll listen to you. And he'll even understand why I told you. Let me avoid him this way. There are big events in the offing."

"Tell me," she said, raising her cup.

So I did, including everything Merlin had told me, up through the confrontation at the primal Pattern and my flight to the Crystal Cave. We went through the entire pot of tea in the process, and when I was finished we just sat for a time in silence.

Finally, she sighed.

"You have charged me to deliver major intelligence," she said.

"I know."

"Yet I feel it is but a small part of much greater developments."

"How's that?" I asked.

"A few small things I have heard, known, guessed at, and perhaps dreamed—and a few, I suppose, I simply fear. Hardly a coherent shape. Yet enough, perhaps, to query the powers of the earth I work with. Yes. Now that I have thought it I must try it, of course. At a time such as this."

She rose slowly, paused, and gestured high.

"That shall be the Tongue," she said, and a draft stirred one of the mobiles causing it to produce many tones.

She crossed the studio to the righthand wall—small figure in gray and green, chestnut hair down to the middle of her back—and ran her fingers lightly over the sculpted figure that stood there. Finally, selecting a broad-faced statue with a narrow torso, she began pushing it toward the center of the room.

I was on my feet and moving in an instant.

"Let me do that for you, Your Highness."

She shook her head.

"Call me Vialle," she said. "And no, I must position them myself. This one is named Memory."

She placed it below and somewhat to the northwest of the Tongue. Then she moved to a knot of figures and selected a thin one with slightly parted lips, which she placed to the south on Tongue's compass.

"…And this is Desire," she stated.

Quickly locating a third—a tall, squinting figure—she placed it to the northeast.

"Caution," she went on.

A lady, her right hand boldly extended, went to the west.

"Risk," she continued.

To the east she positioned another lady, both arms spread wide.

"Heart," she said.

To the southwest went a high-domed, shaggy-browed philosopher. "Head," she said.

…And to the southeast a smiling lady—impossible to say whether her hand was raised in greeting or to deliver a blow.

"Chance," she finished, fitting her into the circle which had come to remind me both of Stonehenge and of Easter Island.

"Bring two chairs," she said, "and place them here and here."

She indicated positions to the north and south of her circle.

I did as she'd said, and she seated herself in the northern-most chair, behind a final figure she had placed: Foresight. I took my place back of Desire.

"Be silent now," she instructed

Then she sat still, hands in her lap, for several minutes.

Finally, "At the deepest level," she said, "what threatens the peace?"

From my left, Caution seemed to speak, though the Tongue chimed his words overhead.

"A redistribution of ancient powers," he said.

"In what manner?"

"That which was hidden becomes known and is moved about," answered Risk.

"Are both Amber and the Courts involved?"

"Indeed," answered Desire, from before me.

"'Ancient powers,'" she said. "How ancient?"

"Before there was an Amber, they were," stated Memory.

"Before there was a Jewel of Judgement—the Eye of the Serpent?"

"No," Memory responded.

She drew a sudden breath.

"Their number?" she said.

"Eleven," Memory replied.

She grew pale at that, but I held my silence as she had instructed.

"Those responsible for this stirring of ashes," she said then, "what do they wish?"

"A return to the glory of days gone by," Desire stated.

"Could this end be realized?"

"Yes," Foresight replied.

"Could it be averted?"

"Yes," said Foresight.

"At peril," Caution added.

"How might one begin?"

"Query the guardians," Head stated.

"How bad is the situation?"

"It has already begun," Head answered.

"And the danger is already present," said Risk.

"So is opportunity," said Chance.

"Of what sort?" Vialle inquired.

There came a sound from across the room as my scabbard and blade slid to the floor from where I had leaned them against the wall. Vialle stared.

"My weapon," I said, "just slipped."

"Name it."

"It was my father's sword, called Werewindle."

"I know of it." Then, "This man, Luke," she said, "there is something about his blade and its sister weapon that figures in all of this. I do not know their stories, though."

"Yes, they are connected," said Memory.

"How?"

"They were created in a similar fashion at near to the same time, and they partake of the powers of which we have spoken," Memory replied.

"Will there be a conflict?"

"Yes," said Foresight.

"On what scale?"

Foresight was silent. Chance laughed.

"I do not understand."

"The laughter of Chance is uncertainty," Head responded.

"Will Luke figure in the conflict?"

"Yes," Foresight answered.

"Should he seek the guardians?"

"He must try," said Heart.

"And if he fails?"

"A Prince approaches even now who knows more of these matters," said Head.

"Who is that?"

"A prisoner freed," Head replied.

"Who?"

"He wears a silver rose," said Head. "He bears the other blade."

Vialle raised her head.

"Have you any questions?" she asked me.

"Yes. But I doubt I'd get an answer if I asked whether we'll win."

Chance laughed as Vialle rose.

She let me help move the statues back into place. Then, seated once more, I said to her, " 'Seek the guardians?' "

"There is a custodian—possibly two," she replied. "A self-exiled Prince of Amber and his sister have guarded a portion of this power for a long while. It would seem in order to see that they still live, still discharge the duty."

"Self-exiled? Why?"

"Personal reasons, involving the late King."

"Where are they?"

"I do not know."

"Then how could we find them?"

"There is a Trump."

She rose and moved to a small chest of drawers. Opening one, she withdrew a boxed set of cards. Slowly, she counted down from the top of the deck and removed one.

When she returned she presented me with the card, portrait of a slim man with hair the color of rust. "His name is Delwin," she said.

"You think I should just call him and ask whether he still has whatever he had?"

"State quickly that you are not of Amber," she told me, "but give your lineage. Ask whether his stewardship of the spikards remains intact. Try to find out where he is, or to go through and discuss it face to face if you can."

"Right," I said, not wanting to tell her that I had spoken—very briefly—with him before in seeking allies in my war against Amber. He'd dismissed me out of hand, but I didn't want to stir Vialle's memories of those days. So I simply said, "Okay. I'll give it a try."

I decided to fast-talk him at first, to give him time to think, to realize that I was not alone, and not to let slip anything of our earlier exchange. My altered appearance should help in this, too.

I reached for contact.

First, the coldness, then a feeling of personality suddenly alert.

"Who is it?" I felt the question even before the likeness took on depth and life.

"Luke Reynard, otherwise known as Rinaldo," I answered, as the card was suddenly animated and I felt his scrutiny, "King of Kashfa and B.S. in Business Management, University of California at Berkeley." Our gazes locked. He seemed neither belligerent nor friendly. "I wanted to know whether your stewardship of the spikards remains intact."

"Luke—Rinaldo," he said, "just what is your concern in this, and how did you come to learn of the matter?"

"While I am not of Amber," I replied, "my father was. I know it is soon to become a matter of concern in that place because of Merlin—son of Corwin—apparently being in direct line for the succession to the throne in the Courts of Chaos."

"I know who Merlin is," Delwin sated. "Who is your father?"

"Prince Brand."

"And your mother?"

"The Lady Jasra, formerly Queen of Kashfa. Now, might we talk about this matter a little?"

"No," Delwin said. "We may not."

He moved his hand as if to break the contact.

"Wait!" I said. "Do you have a microwave oven?"

He hesitated.

"A what?"

"It's a box-like device that can warm a meal in a matter of minutes. I've worked out a general spell to allow one to operate in most of Shadow. Wake up in the middle of the night with a taste for a steaming hot tuna casserole? Take one out of the freezer, unwrap it, and pop it in. What's a freezer? Glad you asked. It's another box, with eternal winter inside. Store meals in there, take one out and zap it in the mike whenever the fancy hits. And yes, I can supply the freezer, too. You don't want to talk spikards, let's talk business. I can give you a deal on these devices, in quantity, that will meet or beat the price of anyone else capable of supplying them—and I don't think it would be an easy thing to find another supplier. But that's not all I can do for you—"

"I'm sorry," said Delwin. "No solicitors either."

His hand moved again.

"Wait!" I cried. "I'll make you an offer you can't refuse!"

He broke the connection.

"Come back," I willed after his image, but it went 2-dimensional and warmed to room temperature again. "Sorry," I said to Vialle. "I gave it my best shot, but he wasn't buying any."

"To tell the truth, I didn't think you'd hold him even that long. But I could tell he was interested in you until you mentioned your mother. Then something changed."

"Wouldn't be the first time," I said. "I've a mind to try him again later."

"In that case, keep the Trump."

"I don't need it, Vialle. I'll make my own when the time comes."

"You are an artist and a Trump master?"

"Well, I do paint. Fairly seriously sometimes."

"Then you must see all of my works while you wait. I'd value your opinion."

"My pleasure," I said. "You mean while I wait—"

"—for Corwin."

"Ah, just so. Thank you."

"You can be the first to use one of the new rooms. We've been doing a lot of reconstruction and remodeling since the Logrus and the Pattern had their confrontation."

"I heard about it," I said. "Very well. I wonder when he'll arrive?"

"Soon, I feel," she said. "I'll summon a servant to get you settled now. Another will bring you to dine with me later, and we can discuss art."

"That will be fine."

I wondered where all of this was going to lead. It seemed that the big picture was about to change drastically again.

Glad Delwin wasn't interested in the microwave oven, though. The spell would have been a bitch to work out.

A Word from Zelazny

"I'll probably do more [Amber novels] eventually. But I've solved the problem for the time being, I think. Recently I decided I would write Amber short stories. I'm using them as a medium for clearing up some of the loose ends in the novels… I wrote [this] one while I was in England, about a month ago [he was Guest of Honor at Lunicon/Unicorn 14 in Leeds from July 30–August 1, 1993]. I thought I'd write a little bit each night. I had a fellow interested in doing a leather-bound edition of short stories [*Ten Tales*]. The price was good, and I decided I'd try to write an Amber story from the viewpoint of a character I hadn't used yet as a viewpoint character. It's also scheduled to appear in Erick Wujcik's *Amberzine*."[1]

Notes

Ambit is the scope of influence or power.

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[1] *Absolute Magnitude*, Fall/Winter 1994.

BLUE HORSE, DANCING MOUNTAINS

Wheel of Fortune, eds. Roger Zelazny and Martin H. Greenberg, AvoNova 1995.
§ *Amber*

I took a right at the Burning Wells and fled smokeghosts across the Uplands of Artine. I slew the leader of the Kerts of Shern as her flock harried me from high-towered perches among the canyons of that place. The others abandoned the sport, and we were through, beneath a green rain out of a slate-colored sky. Onward and down then, to where the plains swirled dust devils that sang of sad eternities in rock that once they were.

At last the winds fell off and Shask, my deadly mount, blue stallion out of Chaos, slowed to a stop before vermilion sands.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"We must cross this neck of the desert to reach the Dancing Mountains," Shask replied.

"And how long a journey might that be?"

"Most of the rest of the day," he said. "It is narrowest here. We have paid in part for this indulgence already. The rest will come in the mountains themselves, for now we must cross where they are very active."

I raised my canteen and shook it.

"Worth it," I said, "so long as they don't really dance in Richter terms."

"No, but at the Great Divide between the shadows of Amber and the shadows of Chaos there is some natural shifting activity in play where they meet."

"I'm no stranger to shadow-storms, which is what that sounds like—a permanent shadow-storm front. But I wish we could just push on through rather than camp there."

"I told you when you chose me, Lord Corwin, that I could bear you farther than any other mount by day. But by night I become an unmoving serpent, hardening to stone and cold as a demon's heart, thawing come dawn."

"Yes, I recall," I said, "and you have served me well, as Merlin said you might. Perhaps we should overnight this side of the mountains and cross tomorrow."

"The front, as I said, shifts. Likely, at some point, it would join you in the foothills or before. Once you reach the region, it matters not where we spend the night. The shadows will dance over us or near us. Dismount now, please, unsaddle, and remove your gear, that I may shift."

"To what?" I asked as I swung to the ground.

"I've a lizard form would face this desert best."

"By all means, Shask, be comfortable, be efficient. Be a lizard."

I set about unburdening him. It was good to be free again.

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Shask as blue lizard was enormously fast and virtually tireless. He got us across the sands with daylight to spare, and as I stood beside him contemplating the trail that led upward through the foothills, he spoke in a sibilant tone: "As I said, the shadows can catch us anywhere around here, and I still have strength to take us up for an hour or so before we camp, rest, and feed. What is your choice?"

"Go," I told him.

Trees changed their foliage even as I watched. The trail was maddeningly irregular, shifting its course, changing its character beneath us. Seasons came and went—a flurrying of snow followed by a blast of hot air, then springtime and blooming flowers. There were glimpses of towers and metal people, highways, bridges, tunnels: gone in moments. Then the entire dance would shift away and we would simply be mounting a trail again.

At last, we made camp in a sheltered area near to a summit. Clouds collected as we ate, and a few rumbles of thunder rolled in the distance. I made myself a low lean-to. Shask transformed himself into a great dragonheaded, winged, feathered serpent, and coiled nearby.

"A good night to you, Shask," I called out, as the first drops fell.

"And–to–you–Corwin," he said softly.

I lay back, closed my eyes, and was asleep almost immediately. How long I slept, I do not know. I was jarred out of it, however, by a terrific clap of thunder which seemed to occur directly overhead.

I found myself sitting up, having reached out to and half drawn Grayswandir, before the echoes died. I shook my head and sat listening. Something seemed to be missing and I could not determine what.

There came a brilliant flash of light and another thunderclap. I flinched at them and sat waiting for more, but only silence followed. Silence...

I stuck my hand outside the lean-to, then my head. It had stopped raining. That was the missing item—the splatter of droplets.

My gaze was attracted by a glow from beyond the nearby summit. I pulled on my boots and departed the shelter. Outside, I buckled on my sword belt and fastened my cloak at the neck. I had to investigate. In a place like this, any activity might represent a threat.

I touched Shask—who indeed felt stony—as I passed, and made my way to where the trail had been. It was still there, though diminished in width, and I set foot upon it and climbed upward. The light source for which I was headed seemed to be moving slightly. Now, faintly, in the distance, I seemed to hear the sound of rainfall. Perhaps it was coming down on the other side of the peak.

As I advanced, I became convinced that it was storming not too far away. I could now hear the moaning of wind within the splashing.

I was suddenly dazzled by a flash from beyond the crest. A sharp report of thunder kept it company. I halted for only a moment. During that time, amid the ringing in my ears, I thought that I heard the sound of a cackling laugh.

Trudging ahead, I came at last to the summit. Immediately, the wind assailed me, bearing a full load of moisture. I drew my cloak closed and fastened it down the front as I made my way forward.

Several paces then, and I beheld a hollow, below and to my left. It was eerily illuminated by dancing orbs of ball lightning. There were two figures within it—one seated on the ground, the other, cross-legged, hanging upside down in the air with no apparent means of support, across from him. I chose the most concealed route I could and headed toward them.

They were lost to my sight much of the way, as the course I had taken bore me through areas of fairly dense foliage. Abruptly, however, I knew that I was near when the rain ceased to fall upon me and I no longer felt the pressures of the wind. It was as if I had entered the still eye of a hurricane.

Cautiously, I continued my advance, winding up on my belly, peering amid branches at the two old men. Both regarded the invisible cubes of a three-dimensional game, pieces hung above a board on the ground between them, squares of their aerial positions limned faintly in fire. The man seated upon the ground was a hunchback, and he was smiling, and I knew him. It was Dworkin Barimen, my legendary ancestor, filled with ages and wisdom and godlike powers, creator of Amber, the Pattern, the Trumps, and maybe reality itself as I understood it. Unfortunately, through much of my dealing with him in recent times, he'd also been more than a little bit nuts.

Merlin had assured me that he was recovered now, but I wondered. Godlike beings are often noted for some measure of nontraditional rationality. It just seems to go with the territory. I wouldn't put it past the old bugger to be using sanity as a pose while in pursuit of some paradoxical end.

The other man, whose back was to me, reached forward and moved a piece that seemed to correspond to a pawn. It was a representation of the Chaos beast known as a Fire Angel. When the move was completed the lightning flashed again and the thunder cracked and my body tingled. Then Dworkin reached out and moved one of his pieces, a Wyvern. Again, the thunder and lightning, the tingling. I saw that a rearing Unicorn occupied the place of the King among Dworkin's pieces, a representation of the palace at Amber on the square beside it. His opponent's King was an erect Serpent, the Thelbane—the great needlelike palace of the Kings of Chaos—beside it.

Dworkin's opponent advanced a piece, laughing as he did so. "Mandor," he announced. "He thinks himself puppet-master and king-maker." After the crash and dazzle, Dworkin moved a piece. "Corwin," he said. "He is free again."

"Yes. But he does not know he is in a race with destiny. I doubt he will make it back to Amber in time to encounter the hall of mirrors. Without their clues, how effective will he be?"

Dworkin smiled and raised his eyes. For a moment, he seemed to be looking right at me. "I think his timing is perfect, Suhuy," he said then, "and I have several pieces of his memory I found years ago drifting above the Pattern in Rebma. I wish I had a golden piss-pot for each time he's been underestimated."

"What would that give you?" asked the other.

"Expensive helmets for his enemies."

Both men laughed, and Suhuy rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise. Dworkin rose into the air and tilted forward until he was parallel to the ground, looking down on the board. Suhuy tended a hand toward a female figure on one of the higher levels, then drew it back. Abruptly, he moved the Fire Angel again. Even as the air was burned and beaten Dworkin made a move, so that the thunder continued into a roll and the brightness hung there. Dworkin said something I could not hear over the din. Suhuy's response to the probable naming was, "But she's a Chaos figure!"

"So? We set no rule against it. Your move."

"I want to study this," Suhuy said. "More than a little."

"Take it with you," Dworkin responded. "Bring it back tomorrow night?"

"I'll be occupied. The night after?"

"I will be occupied. Three nights hence?"

"Yes. Until then—"

"—good night."

The blast and the crash that followed blinded me and deafened me for several moments. Suddenly, I felt the rain and the wind. When my vision cleared, I saw that the hollow was empty. Retreating, I made my way back over the crest and down to my camp, which the rain had found again, also. The trail was wider now.

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I rose at dawn and fed myself while I waited for Shask to stir. The night's doings did not seem like a dream.

"Shask," I said later, "do you know what a hellride is?"

"I've heard of it," he replied, "as an arcane means of traveling great distances in a short time, employed by the House of Amber. Said to be hazardous to the mental health of the noble steed."

"You strike me as being eminently stable, emotionally and intellectually."

"Why, thank you—I guess. Why the sudden rush?"

"You slept through a great show," I said, "and now I've a date with a gang of reflections if I can catch them before they fade."

"If it must be done…"

"We race for the golden piss-pot, my friend. Rise up and be a horse."

A Word from Zelazny

Introducing this story, Zelazny referred to himself as "an eccentric former civil servant with a fondness for mountains and shadows." In the afterword he added, "Yes, I am aware that I left a lot of loose ends hanging in my Amber series. Also, I'd like to carry things a little further than I left them, because it might be a while before I get back and I want to mitigate some of the curses which might be circling overhead and perhaps lay a bit of groundwork for what is eventually to come. I also wanted to characterize further some of the people who haven't been foregrounded yet and could use it. Ergo, I'm writing some Amber short stories. This is the second, and while it does not do all of the above things, it does some."[1]

Notes

Charles **Richter** co-designed the Richter scale to measure earthquake strength. A **wyvern** is a winged, two-legged dragon with a barbed tail.

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[1] *Wheel of Fortune*, eds. Roger Zelazny and Martin H. Greenberg, AvoNova 1995.

THE SHROUDLING AND THE GUISEL

Realms of Fantasy Vol 1 No 1, October 1994.
§ *Amber*

I awoke in a dark room, making love to a lady I did not recall having gone to bed with. Life can be strange. Also oddly sweet at times. I hadn't the will to destroy our congress, and I went on and on with what I was doing and so did she until we came to that point of sudden giving and taking, that moment of balance and rest.

I made a gesture with my left hand and a small light appeared and glowed above our heads. She had long black hair and green eyes, and her cheekbones were high and her brow wide. She laughed when the light came on, revealing the teeth of a vampire. Her mouth held not a trace of blood, making it seem somehow impolite for me to touch my throat seeking after any trace of soreness. "It's been a long time, Merlin," she said softly.

"Madam, you have the advantage of me," I said.

She laughed again. "Hardly," she answered, and she moved in such a fashion as to distract me entirely, causing the entire chain of events to begin again on my part.

"Unfair," I said, staring into those sea-deep eyes, stroking that pale brow. There was something terribly familiar there, but I could not understand it.

"Think," she said, "for I wish to be remembered."

"I...Rhanda?" I asked.

"Your first love, as you were mine," she said smiling, "there in the mausoleum. Children at play, really. But it was sweet, was it not?"

"It still is," I replied, stroking her hair. "No, I never forgot you. Never thought to see you again, though, after finding that note saying your parents no longer permitted you to play with me…thinking me a vampire."

"It seemed so, my Prince of Chaos and of Amber. Your strange strengths and your magics…"

I looked at her mouth, at her unsheathed fangs. "Odd thing for a family of vampires to forbid," I stated.

"Vampires? We're not vampires," she said. "We are among the last of the shroudlings. There are only five families of us left in all the secret images of all the shadows from here to Amber—and farther, on into that place and into Chaos."

I held her more tightly and a long lifetime of strange lore passed through my head. Later I said, "Sorry, but I have no idea of what a shroudling is."

Later still she responded, "I would be very surprised if you did, for we have always been a secret race." She opened her mouth to me, and I saw by spirit-light a slow retraction of her fangs into normal-seeming dentition. "They emerge in times of passion other than feasting," she remarked.

"So you do use them as a vampire would," I said.

"Or a ghoul," she said. "Their flesh is even richer than their blood."

"'Their'?" I said.

"That of those we would take."

"…And who might they be?" I asked.

"Those the world might be better off without," she said. "Most of them simply vanish. Occasionally, with a feast of jokers, only parts of some remain."

I shook my head.

"Shroudling lady, I do not understand," I told her.

"We come and go where we would. We are an undetected people, a proud people. We live by a code of honor which has protected us against all your understanding. Even those who suspect us do not know where to turn to seek us."

"Yet you come and tell me these things."

"I have watched you much of my life. You would not betray us. You, too, live by a code."

"Watched me much of my life? How?"

But we distracted each other then and that moment came to a close. I would not let it die, however. Finally, as we lay side by side, I repeated it. By then, however, she was ready for it.

"I am the fleeting shadow in your mirror," she said. "I look out, yet you see me not. All of us have our pets, my love, a person or place of hobby. You have always been mine."

"Why do you come to me now, Rhanda?" I asked. "After all these years?"

She looked away.

"Mayhap you will die soon," she said after a time, "and I wished to recall our happy days together at Wildwood."

"Die soon? I live in danger. I can't deny it. I'm too near the Throne. But I've strong protectors—and I am stronger than people think."

"As I said, I have watched," she stated. "I do not doubt your prowess. I've seen you hang many spells and maintain them. Some of them I do not even understand."

"You are a sorceress?"

She shook her head. "My knowledge of these matters, while extensive, is purely academic," she said. "My own powers lie elsewhere."

"Where?" I inquired.

She gestured toward my wall. I stared. Finally, I said, "I don't understand."

"Could you turn that thing up?" she asked, nodding toward the spirit-light.

I did so.

"Now move it into the vicinity of your mirror."

I did that also. The mirror was very dark, but so was everything else there in Mandor's guest house, where I had elected to spend the night following our recent reconciliation.

I got out of bed and crossed the room. The mirror was absolutely black, containing no reflection of anything. "Peculiar," I remarked.

"No," she said. "I closed it and locked it after I entered here. Likewise, every other mirror in the house."

"You came in by way of the mirror?"

"I did. I live in the mirrorworld."

"And your family? And the four other families you mentioned?"

"We all of us make our homes beyond the bounds of reflection."

"And from there you travel from place to place?"

"Indeed."

"Obviously, to watch your pets. And to eat people of whom you disapprove?"

"That, too."

"You're scary, Rhanda." I returned to the bed, seating myself on its edge. I took hold of her hand and held it. "And it is good to see you again. I wish you had come to me sooner."

"I have," she said, "using the sleep spells of our kind."

"I wish you had awakened me."

She nodded. "I would like to have stayed with you, or taken you home with me. But for this part of your life you are a certified danger bringer."

"It does seem that way," I agreed. "Still… Why are you here now, apart from the obvious?"

"The danger has spread. It involves us now."

"I actually thought that the danger in my life had been minimized a bit of late," I told her. "I have beaten off Dara's and Mandor's attempts to control me and come to an understanding of sorts with them."

"Yet still they will scheme."

I shrugged. "It is their nature. They know that I know, and they know I am their match. They know I am ready for them now. And my brother Jurt…we, too, seem to have reached an understanding. And Julia…we have been reconciled. We—"

She laughed. "Julia has already used your 'reconciliation' to try to turn Jurt against you. I watched. I know. She stirs his jealousy with hints that she still cares more for you than for him. What she really wants is you removed, along with the seven in the running with you—and the others who stand ready. She would be queen in Chaos."

"She's no match for Dara," I said.

"Ever since she defeated Jasra, she's had a high opinion of herself. It has not occurred to her that Jasra had grown lazy and lost by a trick, not by a matter of power. She would rather believe her own strength greater than it is. And that is her weakness. She would be reunited with you to put you off-guard as well as to turn your brother against you once again."

"I am forewarned, and I thank you—though there are really only six others in the running for the Throne. I was number one, but a half dozen pretenders have recently turned up. You said seven. There's one I don't know about?"

"There is the hidden one," she said. "I do not know his name to tell you, though I know you saw him in Suhuy's pool. I know his appearance, Chaotic and human. I know that even Mandor considers him a worthy antagonist when it comes to scheming.

Conversely, I believe Mandor is the main reason he removed himself to our realm. He fears Mandor."

"He inhabits the mirrorworld?"

"Yes, though he is not yet aware of our existence there. He found it by a near-impossible accident, but he simply thinks he has made a marvelous discovery—a secret way to go nearly anywhere, to see nearly anything without detection. Our people have avoided his awareness, using curves he cannot perceive let alone turn. It has made him considerably more formidable in his path to the Throne."

"If he can look out—even listen—through any mirror without being detected; if he can step out, assassinate someone, and escape by the same route—yes, I can understand it."

The night suddenly seemed very cold. Rhanda's eyes widened. I moved to the chair where I had thrown my garments and began dressing myself.

"Yes, do that," she said.

"There's more, isn't there?"

"Yes. The hidden one has located and brought back an abomination to our peaceful realm. Somewhere, he found a guisel."

"What is a guisel?"

"A being out of our myth, one we had thought long exterminated in the mirrorworld. Its kind nearly destroyed the shroudlings. A monster, it took an entire family to destroy what was thought to be the last of them."

I buckled my sword belt and drew on my boots. I crossed the chamber to the mirror and held my hand before its blackness. Yes, it seemed the source of the cold.

"You closed them and locked them?" I said. "All of the mirrors in this vicinity?"

"The hidden one has sent the guisel through the ways of the mirrors to destroy nine rivals to the Throne. It is on its way to seek the tenth now: yourself."

"I see. Can it break your locks?"

"I don't know. Not easily, I wouldn't think. It brings the cold, however. It lurks just beyond the mirror. It knows that you are here."

"What does it look like?"

"A winged eel with a multitude of clawed legs. It is about 10 feet long."

"If we let it in?"

"It will attack you."

"If we enter the mirror ourselves?"

"It will attack you."

"On which side is it stronger?"

"The same on either, I think."

"Well, hell! Can we enter by a different mirror and sneak up on it?"

"Maybe."

"Let's give it a shot. Come on."

She rose, dressed quickly in a blood-red garment, and followed me through a wall to a room that was actually several miles distant. Like most of the nobles of Chaos, brother Mandor believes in keeping a residence scattered. A long mirror hung on the far wall between the desk and a large Chaos clock. The clock, I saw, was about to chime a nonlinear for the observer. Great. I drew my blade.

"I didn't even know this one was here," she said.

"We're some distance away from the room where I slept. Forget space. Take me through."

"I'd better warn you first," she said. "According to tradition, nobody's ever succeeded in killing a guisel with a sword, or purely by means of magic. Guisels can absorb spells and lashes of force. They can take terrible wounds and survive."

"Any suggestions then?"

"Baffle it, imprison it, banish it. That might be better than trying to kill it."

"OK, we'll play it as it's dealt. If I get into real bad trouble, you get the hell out."

She did not reply but took my hand and stepped into the mirror. As I followed her, the antique Chaos clock began to chime an irregular beat. The inside of the mirror seemed the same as the room without, but turned around. Rhanda led me to the farthest point of the reflection, to the left, then stepped around a corner.

We came into a twisted, twilit place of towers and great residences, none of them familiar to me. The air bore clusters of wavy, crooked lines here and there. She approached one, inserted her free hand, and stepped through it, taking me with her. We emerged on a crooked street lined with twisted buildings.

"Thank you," I said then, "for the warning and for the chance to strike."

She squeezed my hand.

"It is not just for you, but for my family, also, that I do it."

"I know that," I said.

"I would not be doing this if I did not believe that you have a chance against the thing. If I did not, I would simply have warned you and told you what I know. But I also remember one day…back in Wildwood…when you promised to be my champion. You seemed a real hero to me then."

I smiled as I recalled that gloomy day. We had been reading tales of chivalry in the mausoleum. In a fit of nobility I led her outside as the thunder rolled, and I stood among the grave markers of unknown mortals—Dennis Colt, Remo Williams, John Gaunt—and swore to be her champion if ever she needed one. She had kissed me then, and I had hoped for some immediate evil circumstance against which to pit myself on her behalf. But none occurred.

We moved ahead, and she counted doors, halting at the seventh. "That one," she said, "leads through the curves to the place behind the locked mirror in your room."

I released her hand and moved past her.

"All right," I said, "time to go a-guiseling," and I advanced. The guisel saved me the trouble of testing the curves by emerging before I got there.

Ten or 12 feet in length, it was, and eyeless as near as I could tell, with rapid-beating cilia all over what I took to be its head. It was very pink, with a long, green stripe passing about its body in one direction, and a blue one in the other. It raised its cilia-end three or four feet above the ground and swayed. It made a squeaking sound. It turned in my direction. Underneath it had a large, angled mouth like that of a shark; it opened and closed it several times and I saw many teeth. A green, venomous-seeming liquid dripped from that orifice to steam upon the ground.

I waited for it to come to me, and it did. I studied the way it moved—quickly, as it turned out—on the horde of small legs. I held my blade before me in an *en garde* position as I awaited its attack. I reviewed my spells.

It came on, and I hit it with my Runaway Buick and my Blazing Outhouse spells. In each instance, it stopped dead and waited for the spell to run its course. The air grew frigid and steamed about its mouth and midsection. It was as if it were digesting the magic and rushing it down entropy lane. When the steaming stopped, it advanced again and I hit it with my Demented Power Tools spell. Again, it halted, remained motionless, and steamed. This time I rushed forward and struck it a great blow with my blade. It rang like a bell, but nothing else happened, and I drew back as it stirred.

"It seems to eat my spells and excrete refrigeration," I said.

"This has been noted by others," Rhanda responded.

Even as we spoke, it torqued its body, moving that awful mouth to the top, and it lunged at me. I thrust my blade down its throat as its long legs clawed at or caught hold of me. I was driven over backwards as it closed its mouth, and I heard a shattering sound. I was left holding only a hilt. It had bitten off my blade. Frightened, I felt after my new power as the mouth opened again.

The gates of the spikard were opened; and I struck the creature with a raw force from somewhere in Shadow. Again, the thing seemed frozen as the air about me grew chill. I tore myself away from it, bleeding from dozens of small wounds. I rolled away and rose to my feet, still lashing it with the spikard, holding it cold. I tried using the blade to dismember it, but all it did was eat the attack and remain a statue of pink ice.

Reaching out through Shadow, I found myself another blade. With its tip, I traced a rectangle in the air, a bright circle at its center. I reached into it with my will and desire. After a moment, I felt contact.

"Dad! I feel you but I can't see you!"

"Ghostwheel," I said, "I am fighting for my life, and doubtless those of many others. Come to me if you can."

"I am trying. But you have found your way into a strange space. I seem to be barred from entering there."

"Damn!"

"I agree. I have faced this problem before in my travels. It does not lend itself to ready resolution."

The guisel began to move again. I tried to maintain the Trump contact but it was fading. "Father!" Ghostwheel cried as I lost hold. "Try—" Then he was gone. I backed away. I glanced at Rhanda. Dozens of other shroudlings now stood with her, all of them wearing black, white, or red garments. They began to sing a strange, dirgelike song, as if a dark soundtrack were required for our struggle. It did seem to slow the guisel, and it reminded me of something from long ago.

I threw back my head and gave voice to that ululant cry I had heard once in a dream and never forgotten.

My friend came.

Kergma—the living equation—came sliding in from many angles at once. I watched and waited as he/she/it—I had never been certain—assembled itself. Kergma had been a childhood playmate, along with Glait and Gryll.

Rhanda must have remembered the being who could go anywhere, for I heard her gasp. Kergma passed around and around her body in greeting, then came to me and did the same.

"My friends! It has been so long since you called me to play! I have missed you!"

The guisel dragged itself forward against the song of the shroudlings as if beginning to overcome its power. "This is not a game," I answered. "That beast will destroy us all unless we nail it first," I said.

"Then I must solve it for us. Everything that lives is an equation, a complex quantum study. I told you that long ago."

"Yes. Try. Please."

I feared blasting the thing again with the spikard while Kergma worked on it, lest it interfere with his calculations. I kept my blade and spikard at ready as I continued to back away. The shroudlings retreated with me, slowly.

"A deadly balance," Kergma said at last. *"It has a wonderful life equation. Use your toy to stop it now."*

I froze it again with the spikard. The shroudlings' song went on.

At length Kergma said, *"There is a weapon that can destroy it under the right circumstances. You must reach for it, however. It is a twisted blade you have wielded before. It hangs on the wall of a bar where once you drank with Luke."*

"The Vorpal Sword?" I said. "It can kill it?"

"A piece at a time, under the proper circumstances."

"You know these circumstances?"

"I have solved for them."

I clutched my weapon and struck the guisel again with a force from the spikard. It squeaked and grew still. Then I discarded the blade I held and reached—far, far out through Shadow. I was a long time in finding what I sought and I had a resistance to overcome, so I added the force of the spikard to my own and it came to me. Once again, I held the shining, twisted Vorpal Sword in my hands.

I moved to strike at the guisel with it, but Kergma stopped me. So I hit it again with a lash of force from the spikard.

"Not the way. Not the way."

"What then?"

"We require a Dyson variation on the mirror equation."

"Show me."

Walls of mirrors shot up on all sides about me, the guisel, and Kergma, but excluding Rhanda. We rose into the air and drifted toward the center of the sphere. Our reflections came at us from everywhere.

"Now. But you must keep it from touching the walls."

"Save your equation. I may want to do something with it by and by."

I struck the dormant guisel with the Vorpal Sword. Again, it emitted a bell-like tone and remained quiescent.

"No," Kergma said. *"Let it thaw."*

So I waited until it began to stir, meaning that it would be able to attack me soon. Nothing is ever easy. From outside, I still heard the faint sounds of singing.

The guisel recovered more quickly than I had anticipated. But I swung and lopped off half its head, which seemed to divide itself into tissue-thin images which then flew away in every direction.

"Callooh! Callay!" I cried, swinging again and removing a long section of tissue from its right side, which repeated the phenomenon of the ghosting and the flight. It came on again and I cut again. Another chunk departed from its twisting body in the same fashion. Whenever its writhing took it near a wall, I intervened with my body and sword, driving it back toward the center and hacking at or slicing it.

Again and again it came on or flipped toward the wall. Each time my response was similar. But it did not die. I fought it till but a tip of its writhing tail moved before me.

"Kergma," I said then, "we've sent most of it down infinite lines. Now, can you revise the equation? Then I'll find sufficient mass with the spikard to allow you to create another guisel for me—one that will return to the sender of this one and regard that person as prey."

"I think so," Kergma said. *"I take it you left that final piece for the new one to eat?"*

"Yes, that was my thinking."

And so it was done. When the walls came down, the new guisel—black, its stripes red and yellow—was rubbing against my ankles like a cat. The singing stopped.

"Go and seek the hidden one," I said, "and return the message."

It raced off, passing a curve and vanishing.

"What have you done?" Rhanda asked me. So I told her.

"The hidden one will now consider you the most dangerous of his rivals," she said, "if he lives. Probably he will increase his efforts against you, in subtlety as well as violence."

"Good," I said. "That is my hope. I'd like to force a confrontation. He will probably not feel safe in your world now either, never knowing when a new guisel might come a-hunting."

"True," she said. "You have been my champion," and she kissed me.

Just then, out of nowhere, a paw appeared and fell upon the blade I held. Its opposite waved two slips of paper before me. Then a soft voice spoke: "You keep borrowing that sword without signing for it. Kindly do that now, Merlin. The other slip is for last time." I found a ballpoint beneath my cloak and signed as the rest of the cat materialized. "That'll be $40," it said then. "It costs 20 bucks for each hour or portion of an hour, to vorp."

I dug around in my pockets and came up with the fees. The cat grinned and began to fade. "Good doing business with you," it said through the smile. "Come back soon. The next drink's on the house. And bring Luke. He's a great baritone."

I noticed as it faded that the shroudling family had also vanished.

Kregma moved nearer. *"Where are the others—Glait and Gryll?"*

"I left Grait in a wood," I replied, "though he may well be back in the Windmaster's vase in Gramble's museum in the Ways of Sawall by now. If you see him, tell him that the bigger thing has not eaten me—and he will drink warm milk with me one night and hear more tales yet. Gryll, I believe, is in the employ of my Uncle Suhuy."

"Ah, the Windmaster...those were the days," he said. *"Yes, we must get together and play again. Thank you for calling me for this one,"* and he slid off in many directions and was gone, like the others.

"What now?" Rhanda asked.

"I am going home and back to bed." I hesitated, then said, "Come with me?"

She hesitated too, then nodded. "Let us finish the night as we began it," she said.

We walked through the seventh door and she unlocked my mirror. I knew that she would be gone when I awoke.

A Word from Zelazny

"This story takes up the affairs of Merlin, son of Corwin, from where I left him at the end of *Prince of Chaos*, the 10th and most recent book in my Amber series. As a Prince of Amber on his father's side and a Prince of Chaos on his mother's, Merlin has some problems—not the least of these being that he finds himself in the line of succession for the recently vacated Throne of Chaos, a position he is not anxious to assume. He had felt himself well-protected from it by the number of claimants ahead of him. Unfortunately, they have been dying off most rapidly, generally by means other than the natural. He suspects his mother, Dara, and his half-brother, Mandor, of having a hand in this. But he recently faced both of them down in a magical duel, and they seem to have had second thoughts about his tractability, should one of them manage to seat him on the Throne. Time will tell. In the meantime, he went off to one of Mandor's guest houses, hoping for a good night's sleep."[1]

Notes

Rhanda has **green eyes**, which occur in less than 2% of people but are a recurrent motif among Zelazny's characters. At least 32 of his novels and short stories mention green, emerald, or jade eyes. **Dennis/Denny Colt** is "The Spirit," a masked comic book crime-fighter created by writer-artist Will Eisner. **Remo Williams** is the US secret agent from The Destroyer series of novels created by Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir. **John Gaunt** is Grimjack in John Ostrander's comic book series. **The Vorpal sword** comes from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky." The Cheshire Cat from Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* makes an anonymous appearance at the end to bill for the sword's use. **Callooh Callay** is a joyous expression from "Jabberwocky."

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[1] *Realms of Fantasy* Vol 1 No 1, October 1994.

COMING TO A CORD

Pirate Writings Vol 3 No 2, June 1995.
§ *Amber*

It is no fun being tied to a bedpost when you are feeling under the weather. I phased back and forth between visibility and invisibility uncontrollably. On the other wrist, I felt my ability to communicate beginning to return. My increased sentience had remained with me ever since my strange journey with Merlin in the place between shadows. But there was a shock on my return to this reality. Slowly now, I was recovering from it, though some of the symptoms were slower in going than others. Consequently, it took me much longer than it normally would have to unknot myself.

I am Frakir, strangling cord to Merlin—Lord of Amber and Prince of Chaos. Normally, too, he would never have abandoned me like this, in the blasted apartments of Brand, late Prince of Amber and would-be Lord of the Universe. But he was under a mild spell Brand had actually left about for his son Rinaldo. However, Merlin has such a strong affinity with Rinaldo—also known as Luke—by virtue of their long association, that the spell latched onto him. He must have shaken it by now, but that still left me in an awkward position, with him doubtless back in the Courts.

I did not feel like waiting around with all the rebuilding and redecorating going on. They could decide to chuck the bed, with me attached, and go for all new stuff.

I finished unknotting myself. At least Merlin had used no magic when he'd tied me there. On the other hand, it was a tight knot, and I squirmed for a long while to get myself unlooped. Finally, the thing was loosened and I was able to undo it. Once I had freed myself from its subtle geometries, I slithered down the bedpost to the ground.

This left me in a position to slip away, should a gang of furniture movers suddenly appear. In fact, it suddenly seemed a good idea to get out of the fast traffic lane now.

I moved away from the bed—out of Brand's room and into Merlin's—wondering what had been the secret of that ring he'd found and put on—the spikard thing.

That it was extremely powerful and drew its energies from many sources was obvious to a being such as myself. That it seemed a thing of the same order as the sword Werewindle was also readily apparent, despite their varied forms to the eye of a human. Suddenly, it occurred to me that Merlin might not notice this, and I began to think that it might be necessary he should.

I crossed his room. I can move like a snake when I would. I have no ability to transport myself magically like almost everyone else I know, so I figured it were best to find someone who did. My only problem was that, in keeping with the family's general policy of personal secrecy on everything from magic to soufflé recipes, many of them did not even know I existed.

...And for that matter I didn't know the location of their apartments, save for Merlin's, Brand's, Random and Vialle's, and Martin's—which Merlin sometimes visited. Random and Vialle's would be hard to reach, with all the work that was going on. So I headed off in the direction of Martin's rooms and slithered under the door when I got there. He had rock posters on most of his walls, as well as the speakers for a magically powered CD player. He, alas, was absent, and I had no idea when he might return.

I went back out into the hall and slithered along it, listening for a familiar voice, checking under doors, into rooms. This went on for some time before I heard Flora say, "Oh, bother!" from behind a door up the hall. I headed in that direction. She was one of the ones privy to my existence.

Her door was closed, but I was able to make my way beneath it into a highly decorated sitting room. She seemed in the process of mending a broken fingernail with some sort of goo.

I crossed the room to her side, maintaining my invisibility, and wrapped myself about her right ankle.

Hello, I said. *This is Frakir, Merlin's friend and strangling cord. Can you help me?*

Following a moment of silence, she said, "Frakir! What's happened? What do you need?"

I was inadvertently abandoned, I explained, *while Merlin was under the influence of a peculiar spell. I need to get in touch with him. I've realized something he may need to know. Also, I want to get back on his wrist.*

"I'll give his Trump a try," she said, "though if he's in the Courts I'll probably not be able to reach him."

I heard her open a drawer, and moments later I listened to her fumbling with cards. I tried to tune in on her thoughts as she manipulated them, but I could not.

"Sorry," she said, after a time. "I can't seem to get through to him."

Thanks for trying, I told her.

"When did you get separated from Merlin?" she asked.

It was the day the Powers met in the back hall, I said.

"What sort of spell did Merlin get caught up in?"

One that was hanging fairly free in Brand's quarters. You see, Merlin's and Brand's rooms being next door to each other, he'd entered out of curiosity when the wall fell during the confrontation.

"Frakir, I don't think that was an accident," she said. "One Power or the other probably arranged for things to be so."

Seems likely when one thinks about it, Princess.

"What do you want to do now? I'll be glad to help," she said.

I'd like to find a way to get back to Merlin, I said. *He's had a general aura of danger about him for some time—to which I am particularly sensitive.*

"I understand," she said, "and I'll find a way. It may take a few days, but I'll figure something."

All right. I'll wait, I said. *I've no real choice in the matter.*

"You're welcome to stay with me till that happens."

I'll do that, I said. *Thanks.*

I found a comfortable-looking table and wrapped myself about one of its legs. I went into stasis then, if one needs a word for it. It is not sleep, as there is no loss of consciousness. But there is no thinking in the conventional sense either. I just sort of spread out my awareness and *am,* until I am needed.

How long I lay coiled in this position, I have no way of telling. I was alone in the sitting room, though I was aware of Flora's breathing next door.

Suddenly, she shrieked. This time, I just loosened myself and dropped to the floor.

As I began hurrying toward the room I heard another voice.

"Sorry," it said. "I am pursued. I had no choice but to drop in without invitation."

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Well, I'm a sorcerer," he said. "I was hiding in your mirror, as I have every night for a long while. I have this crush on you and I like to watch you as you go about your business."

"A Peeping Tom—a voyeur!" she said.

"No," he said. "I think you're a really nice-looking lady, and I like watching you. That's all."

"There are many legitimate ways by which you could have gained an introduction," she said.

"True, but that way might have led to horrible complications in my life."

"Oh, you're married."

"Worse than that," he said.

"What, then?"

"No time now. I can feel its approach," he said.

"What's approach?"

"The guisel," he said. "I sent one to slay another sorcerer, but he disposed of it and sent one of his own after me. Didn't know he was that good. I don't know how to dispose of the things, and it will be oozing through that mirror in a matter of minutes, to destroy us all most nastily. So, this place being Amber and all, is there some hero available who might be anxious to earn another merit badge?"

"I think not," she replied. "Sorry."

Just then the mirror began to darken.

"Oh, it's coming!" he cried.

I had felt the menace it exuded some time before. But then, that is my job.

But now I got a glimpse of the thing. It was big, and wormlike, eyeless, but possessed of a shark-like mouth, a multitude of short legs, and vestigial wings. It was twice again the length of a human, and black, having crisscrossing red and yellow stripes. It slithered across our reflected room, rearing as it came on.

"You imply," Flora said, "in your quest for a hero, that it will make it through that interface and attack us?"

"In a word," said the strange little man, "yes."

When it does, I said to Flora, *throw me at it. Wherever I hit I'll stick—and I'll go for the throat.*

"All right," she said, "and there's one other thing."

What's that? I asked.

"Help! Help!" she cried.

It began crawling out through the silver, flower-bordered mirror.

Flora unwound me from her ankle and threw me at the thing. It had no real neck, but I wrapped myself about its upper extremity below the mouth and began tightening immediately.

Flora continued to call out, and from somewhere up the hall I heard the sound of heavy footfalls.

I tightened my grip, but the creature's neck was like rubber.

The sorcerer was moving to exit the room when the door burst open and the tall and husky, red-haired form of Luke entered.

"Flora!" he said, and then he saw the guisel and drew his blade.

On my recent journey with Merlin in the space between shadows I had gained the ability to converse at complex levels. My perceptions—which seem quite different—also became more acute. They showed me nothing special about Luke, the sorcerer, or the guisel, but Werewindle now burned of an entirely different light. I realized then that it was not merely a blade.

As Luke moved to position himself between Flora and the guisel, I heard the sorcerer say, "What is that blade?"

" 'Tis called Werewindle," Luke replied.

"And you are…?"

"Rinaldo, King of Kashfa," Luke said.

"Your father—who was he?"

"Brand—Prince of Amber."

"Of course," the sorcerer said, moving again toward the door. "You can destroy that thing with it. Command it to draw energy while you're using it. It has a virtually limitless supply to draw upon."

"Why?" Luke asked.

"Because it isn't really a sword."

"What is it then?"

"Sorry," the sorcerer said, regarding the guisel, which was now moving toward us. "Out of time. Got to find another mirror."

I could tell that he was, unaware of my presence, really teasing Luke, because I had figured it out for myself and knew it would take only a moment to tell him, if one could speak.

Then I was disengaging and dropping as fast as I could, for Luke was swinging Werewindle, and I'd no desire to be severed. I really did not know what would happen if this were to occur—if both segments would wind up as wise, witty, and conscious as myself;

or, perhaps, whether I would be destroyed in the process. And having no desire to learn this information firsthand, flight seemed most prudent.

I hit the floor before the blow fell. A section of the guisel's head also dropped, still writhing. I squirmed toward Luke's nearest ankle. Flora picked up a heavy chair and brought it down on the thing's back with considerable force, despite her broken fingernail. And she swung it a couple of more times, with some effect, while Luke was in the process of cutting it in half.

I found my way to where I was headed, crawled up, and caught hold.

Can you hear me, Luke? I tried then.

"Yes," he replied. "What are you?"

Merlin's strangling cord, Frakir.

Luke swung at the hind section then as it whipped toward him, tiny legs clawing. Then he whirled and halved the attacking forepart. Flora struck its rear end again with the chair.

I know what the sorcerer knew, I said.

"Oh, what's that?" he asked, slicing off another section and slipping on its gooey exudation as he retreated.

You might well be able to draw enough energy through Werewindle to destroy a world.

"Really?" he said, struggling to regain his feet as a section of the creature thrust itself upon him. "All right."

He touched it with the point of his blade and it withdrew from him as if shocked. Then he rose to his feet.

"You're right," he said. "There's something to it." He touched the attacking segment again and it vanished in a burst of blue fire. "Flora! Get back!" he cried.

She did, and he proceeded to incinerate the section that had been about to attack her. Then another that came at him.

"I'm getting the hang of it," he said, turning to get another segment. "But I'm not quite sure why it works this way."

It's not just a sword, I said.

"What is it, then?"

Long before there was Werewindle, it was the spikard Rawg.

"Spikard? Like that strange ring Merlin picked up?"

Exactly.

With rapid moves then, Luke disposed of the rest of the guisel.

"Thanks, Frakir," he said, "for telling me how the thing worked.

I'd better try a quick search for that sorcerer now, though I've a hunch he disappeared into the nearest mirror."

I'd guess that, too.

"What was his name?"

He didn't say.

"It figures."

"Flora," he continued, "I'm going to look for that sorcerer. I'll be back in a bit. Good show."

She gave him a smile and he departed. Needless to say, the sorcerer did not turn up.

"Wonder where he came from, beyond the mirror," Luke asked.

I've no idea, I replied. *I think I might be more interested in the person who sent that thing after him.*

Luke nodded.

"What now?" he asked.

I guess we tell Flora that her Peeping Tom has hit the road, I said. *You're a sorcerer. Any way of fixing her mirrors so he can't pull that routine again?*

"I think so," Luke said, moving to the nearest window and looking out. "I'll fix them in just a bit. What about you?"

I'd like to get back to Merlin.

"I can't send you through by Trumps if he's in the Courts—and I suspect he is."

What about Werewindle?

"I still don't know exactly how it works. I'm going to have to practice some with it."

Uh—why are you here? I asked.

"Had to talk to Vialle about a number of things," he said, "and she told me that Corwin might be by soon—and she offered me room and board if I wanted to wait for him for a few days."

Well, if you can wear me till he gets here maybe I can persuade him to take me with him. I've a feeling he'll be seeing Merlin again soon.

"I might, too, but it's hard to say at this point."

Okay. We can work it out when the time comes.

"What do you think is going on, anyway?"

Some horrible Wagnerian thing, I told him, *full of blood, thunder, and death for us all.*

"Oh, the usual," Luke said.

Exactly, I replied.

A Word from Zelazny

"This story takes up the second Amber series where 'The Shroudling and the Guisel' left off. It shows the continuing tale of Merlin's strangling cord, Frakir, while telling more about the leftover guisel and the sorcerer responsible for the affair behind the mirror. Flora and the visiting Luke are drawn into the action.

"I have been using an occasional short story of late to tie up loose ends I'd left hanging in the previous Amber books and stories, as well as to continue the overall narrative. The first of these was 'The Salesman's Tale' featuring Luke and Vialle, and the second was 'Blue Horse, Dancing Mountains.' 'The Shroudling and the Guisel' was the third Amber short story, and 'Coming to a Cord' is the fourth.

"So, if anyone has a burning Amber question, I suggest they send it to me c/o AvoNova and I may be able to straighten the matter out in one of these stories (I may not, also). And to all you Amber fans, thanks for hanging around for so long."[1]

Notes

Wagnerian thing refers to the epic works of German composer Richard Wagner (the Ring Cycle, Tristan and Isolde, etc.).

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[1] *Pirate Writings* Vol 3 No 2, June 1995.

HALL OF MIRRORS

Castle Fantastic, ed. John DeChancie, DAW 1996.
§ *Amber*

Neither of us realized there had been a change until a half-dozen guys tried an ambush.

We had spent the night in the Dancing Mountains, Shask and I, where I'd witnessed a bizarre game between Dworkin and Suhuy. I'd heard strange tales about things that happened to people who spent the night there, but I hadn't had a hell of a lot of choice in the matter. It had been storming, I was tired, and my mount had become a statue. I don't know how that game turned out, though I was mentioned obliquely as a participant and I'm still wondering.

The next morning my blue horse Shask and I had crossed the Shadow Divide 'twixt Amber and Chaos. Shask was a Shadow mount my son Merlin had found for me in the royal stables of the Courts. At the moment, Shask was traveling under the guise of a giant blue lizard, and we were singing songs from various times and places.

Two men rose on either side of the trail from amid rocky cover, pointing crossbows at us. Two more stepped out before us—one with a bow, the other bearing a rather beautiful-looking blade, doubtless stolen, considering the guy's obvious profession.

"Halt! and no harm'll happen," said the swordsman.

I drew rein.

"When it comes to money, I'm pretty much broke right now," I said, "and I doubt any of you could ride my mount, or would care to."

"Well now, maybe and maybe not," said the leader, "but it's a rough way to make a living, so we take whatever we can."

"It's not a good idea to leave a man with nothing," I said. "Some people hold grudges."

"Most of them can't walk out of here."

"Sounds like a death sentence to me."

He shrugged.

"That sword of yours looks pretty fancy," he said. "Let's see it."

"I don't think that's a good idea," I said.

"Why not?"

"If I draw it, I may wind up killing you," I said.

He laughed.

"We can take it off your body," he said, glancing to his right and left.

"Maybe," I said.

"Let's see it."

"If you insist."

I drew Grayswandir with a singing note. It persisted, and the eyes of the swordsman before me widened as it went on to describe an arc calculated to intersect with his neck. His own weapon came out as mine passed through his neck and continued. His cut toward Shask and passed through the animal's shoulder. Neither blow did any damage whatsoever.

"You a sorcerer?" he asked as I swung again, delivering a blow that might have removed his arm. Instead, it passed harmlessly by.

"Not the kind who does things like this. You?"

"No," he answered, striking again. "What's going on?"

I slammed Grayswandir back into the scabbard.

"Nothing," I said. "Go bother someone else."

I shook the reins, and Shask moved forward.

"Shoot him down!" the man cried.

The men on either side of the trail released their crossbow bolts, as did the other man before me. All four bolts from the sides passed through Shask, three of the men injuring or killing their opposite numbers. The one from ahead passed through me without pain or discomfort. An attempted sword blow achieved nothing for my first assailant.

"Ride on," I said.

Shask did so and we ignored their swearing as we went.

"We seem to have come into a strange situation," I observed.

The beast nodded.

"At least it kept us out of some trouble," I said.

"Funny. I'd a feeling you would have welcomed trouble," Shask said.

I chuckled.

"Perhaps, perhaps not," I replied. "I wonder how long the spell lasts?"

"Maybe it has to be lifted."

"Shit! That's always a pain."

"Beats being insubstantial."

"True."

"Surely someone back at Amber will know what to do."

"Hope so."

We rode on, and we encountered no one else that day. I felt the rocks beneath me when I wrapped myself in my cloak to sleep that night. Why did I feel them when I didn't feel a sword or a crossbow bolt? Too late to ask Shask whether he had felt anything, for he had turned to stone for the night.

I yawned and stretched. A partly unsheathed Grayswandir felt normal beneath my fingers. I pushed it back in and went to sleep.

Following my morning ablutions, we rode again. Shask was taking well to hellrides, as well as most Amber mounts did. Better, in some ways. We raced through a wildly changing landscape. I thought ahead to Amber, and I thought back to the time I'd spent imprisoned in the Courts. I had honed my sensitivity to a very high degree through meditation, and I began to wonder whether that, coupled with other strange disciplines I'd undertaken, could have led to my intangibility. I supposed it might have contributed, but I'd a feeling the Dancing Mountains were the largest donor.

"I wonder what it represents and where it came from?" I said aloud.

"Your homeland, I'd bet," Shask replied, "left especially for you."

"Why did you read it that way?"

"You've been telling me about your family as we rode along. I wouldn't trust them."

"Those days are past."

"Who knows what might have happened while you were away? Old habits return easily."

"One would need a reason for something like that."

"For all you know, one of them has a very good one."

"Possibly. But it doesn't seem likely. I've been away for some time, and few know I'm free at last."

"Then question those few."

"We'll see."

"Just trying to be helpful."

"Don't stop. Say, what do you want to do after we get to Amber?"

"Haven't made up my mind yet. I've been something of a wanderer."

I laughed.

"You're a beast after my own heart. In that your sentiments are most unbeastlike, how can I repay you for this transport?"

"Wait. I've a feeling the Fates will take care of that."

"So be it. In the meantime, though, if you happen to think of something special, let me know."

"It's a privilege to help you, Lord Corwin. Let it go at that."

"All right. Thanks."

We passed through shadow after shadow. Suns ran backward and storms assailed us out of beautiful skies. We toyed with night, which might have trapped a less adroit pair than us, found a twilight, and took our rations there. Shortly thereafter, Shask turned back to stone. Nothing attacked us that night, and my dreams were hardly worth dreaming.

Next day we were on our way early, and I used every trick I knew to shortcut us through Shadow on our way home. Home… It did feel good to be headed back, despite Shask's comments on my relatives. I'd no idea I would miss Amber as much as I had. I'd been away far longer on countless occasions, but usually I had at least a rough idea as to when I might be heading back. A prison in the Courts, though, was not a place from which one might make such estimates.

So we tore on, wind across a plain, fire in the mountains, water down a steep ravine. That evening I felt the resistance begin, the resistance which comes when one enters that area of Shadow near to Amber. I tried to make it all the way but failed. We spent that night at a place near to where the Black Road used to run. There was no trace of it now.

The next day the going was slower, but, more and more, familiar shadows cropped up. That night we slept in Arden, but Julian did not find us. I either dreamed his hunting horn or heard it in the distance as I slept; and though it is often prelude to death and destruction, it merely made me feel nostalgic. I was finally near to home.

The next morning I woke before sunup. Shask, of course, was still a blue lizard curled at the base of a giant tree. So I made tea and ate an apple afterward. We were low on provisions but should soon be in the land of plenty.

Shask slowly unwound as the sun came up. I fed him the rest of the apples and gathered my possessions.

We were riding before too long, slow and easy, since there would be some hard climbing up the back route I favored. During our first break I asked him to become once more a horse, and he obliged. It didn't seem to make that much difference, and I requested he maintain it. I wanted to display his beauty in that form.

"Will you be heading right back after you've seen me here?" I asked.

"I've been meaning to talk to you about that," he responded. "Things have been slow back in the Courts, and I'm no one's assigned mount."

"Oh?"

"You're going to need a good mount, Lord Corwin."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"I'd like to apply for the job, for an indefinite period."

"I'd be honored," I said. "You're very special."

"Yes, I am."

We were atop Kolvir that afternoon and onto the grounds of Amber Palace within hours after that. I found Shask a good stall, groomed him, fed him, and left him to turn to stone at his leisure. I found a nameplate, scratched Shask's name and my own upon it, and tacked it to his door.

"See you later," I said.

"Whatever, Lord. Whatever."

I departed the stables and headed for the palace. It was a damp, cloudy day, with a chill breeze from the direction of the sea. So far, no one had spotted me.

I entered by way of the kitchen, where there was new help on duty. None of them recognized me, though they obviously realized that I belonged. At least, they returned my greeting with due respect and did not object to some fruit I pocketed. They did ask whether I cared to have something sent to one of the rooms, and I answered "yes" and told them to send a bottle of wine and a chicken along with it. The afternoon head chef—a redhaired lady named Clare—began studying me more closely, and more than once her gaze drifted toward the silver rose on my cloak. I did not want to announce my identity just then, and I thought they'd be a little afraid to guess ahead at it, at least for a few hours. I did want the time to rest a bit and just enjoy the pleasure of being back. So, "Thanks," I said, and I went on my way to my quarters.

I started up the back stairs the servants use for being unobtrusive and the rest of us for being sneaky.

Partway up, I realized that the way was blocked by sawhorses. Tools lay scattered about the stairs though there were no workmen in sight—and I couldn't tell whether a section of old stair had simply given way or whether some other force had been brought to bear upon it.

I returned, cut around to the front, and took the big stairway up. As I made my way, I saw signs of exterior repair work, including entire walls and sections of flooring. Any number of apartments were open to viewing. I hurried to make sure that mine was not among their number.

Fortunately, it was not. I was about to let myself in when a big redhaired fellow turned a corner and headed toward me. I shrugged. Some visiting dignitary, no doubt…

"Corwin!" he called out. "What are you doing here?"

As he drew nearer, I saw that he was studying me most intently. I gave him the same treatment.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure," I said.

"Aw, come on, Corwin," he said. "You surprised me. Thought you were off by your Pattern and the '57 Chevy."

I shook my head.

"Not sure what you're talking about," I said.

He narrowed his eyes.

"You're not a Pattern ghost?" he said.

"Merlin told me something about them," I said, "after he effected my release at the Courts. But I don't believe I've ever met one."

I rolled up my left sleeve.

"Cut me. I bleed," I said.

As he studied my arm, his gaze appeared more than a little serious. For a moment, I thought he'd actually take me up on it.

"All right," he said then. "Just a nick. For security purposes."

"I still don't know who I'm talking to," I said.

He bowed.

"Sorry. I am Luke of Kashfa, sometimes known as Rinaldo I, its king. If you are who you say you are, I am your nephew. My dad was your brother Brand."

Studying him, I saw the resemblance. I thrust my arm farther forward.

"Do it," I said.

"You're serious."

"Dead right."

He drew a Bowie knife from his belt then and looked into my eyes. I nodded. He moved to touch my forearm with its tip and nothing happened. That is to say, something happened, but it was neither desired nor wholly anticipated.

The point of his blade seemed to sink a half-inch or so into my arm. It kept going then, finally passing all the way through. But no blood came.

He tried again. Nothing.

"Damn," he said. "I don't understand. If you were a Pattern ghost, we'd at least get a flare. But there's not even a mark on you."

"May I borrow the blade?" I asked.

"Sure."

He passed it to me. I took it in my hand and studied it, I pushed it into my arm and drew it along for perhaps three-quarters of an inch. Blood oozed.

"I'll be damned," Luke said. "What's going on?"

"I'd say it's a spell I picked up when I spent a night in the Dancing Mountains recently," I replied.

"Hm," Luke mused, "I've never had the pleasure, but I've heard stories of the place. I don't know any simple ways to break its spells. My room's off toward the front." He gestured southward. "If you'd care to stop by, I'll see what I can figure out about it. I studied Chaos magic with my dad, and with my mother, Jasra."

I shrugged.

"This is my room right here," I said, "and I've a chicken and a bottle of wine on the way up. Let's do the diagnosis in here, and I'll split the meal with you."

He smiled.

"Best offer I've had all day," he said. "But let me stop back at my room for some tools of the trade."

"All right. I'll walk you back, so I'll know the way in case I need it."

He nodded and turned. We headed up the hall.

Turning the corner, we moved from west to east, passing Flora's apartments and moving in the direction of some of the better visitors' quarters. Luke halted before one room and reached into his pocket, presumably after the key. Then he halted.

"Uh, Corwin?" he said.

"What?" I responded.

"Those two big cobra-shaped candle holders," he said, gesturing up the hall. "Bronze, I believe."

"Most likely. What of them?"

"I thought they were just hall decorations."

"That's what they are."

"The last time I looked at them, they kind of bracketed a small painting or tapestry," he said.

"My recollection, too," I said.

"Well, there seems to be a corridor between them now."

"No, that can't be. There's a proper hallway just a little beyond—" I began.

Then I shut up because I knew. I began walking toward it.

"What's going on?" Luke asked.

"It's calling me," I said. "I've got to go and see what it wants."

"What is it?"

"The Hall of Mirrors. It comes and goes. It brings sometimes useful, sometimes ambiguous messages to the one it calls."

"Is it calling us both, or just you?" Luke said.

"Dunno," I replied. "I feel it calling me, as it has in the past. You're welcome to come with me. Maybe it has some goodies for you, too."

"You ever hear of two people taking it at once?"

"No, but there's a first time for everything," I said.

Luke nodded slowly.

"What the hell," he said. "I'm game."

He followed me to the place of the snakes, and we peered up it. Candles flared along its walls, at either hand. And the walls glittered from the countless mirrors which hung upon them. I stepped forward. Luke followed, at my left.

The mirror frames were of every shape imaginable. I walked very slowly, observing the contents of each one. I told Luke to do the same. For several paces, the mirrors seemed simply to be giving back what was before them. Then Luke stiffened and halted, head turning to the left.

"Mom!" he said explosively.

The reflection of an attractive red-haired woman occupied a mirror framed in green-tinged copper in the shape of an Ouroboros serpent.

She smiled.

"So glad you did the right thing, taking the throne," she said.

"You really mean that?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied.

"Thought you might be mad. Thought you wanted it," he said.

"I did once, but those damned Kashfans never appreciated me. I've got the Keep now, though, and I feel like doing a few years' research here—and it's full of sentimental values as well. So as long as Kashfa stays in the family, I wanted you to know I was pleased."

"Why—uh—glad to hear that, Mom. Very glad. I'll hang onto it."

"Do," she said, and vanished.

He turned to me, a small ironic smile flickering across his lips.

"That's one of the rare times in my life when she's approved of something I've done," he said. "Doubtless for all the wrong reasons, but still… How real are these things? What exactly did we see? Was that a conscious communication on her part? Was—"

"They're real," I said. "I don't know how or why or what part of the other is actually present. They may be stylized, surreal, may even suck you in. But in some way they're really real. That's all I know. Holy cow!"

From the huge gold-framed mirror, ahead and to my right, the grim visage of my father Oberon peered forth. I advanced a pace.

"Corwin," he said. "You were my chosen, but you always had a way of disappointing me."

"That's the breaks," I said.

"True. And one should not speak of you as a child after all these years. You've made your choices. Of some I have been proud. You have been valiant."

"Why, thank you—sir."

"I bid you do something immediately."

"What?"

"Draw your dagger and stab Luke."

I stared.

"No," I said.

"Corwin," Luke said. "It could be something like your proving you're not a Pattern ghost."

"But I don't give a damn whether you're a Pattern ghost," I said. "It's nothing to me."

"Not that," Oberon interjected. "This is of a different order."

"What, then?" I asked.

"Easier to show than to tell," Oberon replied.

Luke shrugged.

"So nick my arm," he said. "Big deal."

"All right. Let's see how the show beats the tell."

I drew a stiletto from my boot sheath. He pulled back his sleeve and extended his arm. I stabbed lightly.

My blade passed through his arm as if the limb were made of smoke.

"Shit," Luke said. "It's contagious."

"No," Oberon responded. "It is a thing of very special scope."

"That is to say?" Luke asked.

"Would you draw your sword, please?"

Luke nodded and drew a familiar-looking golden blade. It emitted a high keening sound, causing all of the candle flames in the vicinity to flicker.

Then I knew it for what it was—my brother Brand's blade, Werewindle.

"Haven't seen that in a long while," I said, as the keening continued.

"Luke, would you cut Corwin with your blade, please?"

Luke raised his eyes, met my gaze. I nodded. He moved the blade, scored my arm with its point. I bled.

"Corwin—If you would…?" Oberon said.

I drew Grayswandir and it, too, ventured into fighting song—as I had only heard it do on great battlefields in the past. The two tones joined together into a devastating duet.

"Cut Luke."

Luke nodded and I sliced the back of his hand with Grayswandir. An incision line occurred, reddening immediately. The sounds from our blades rose and fell. I sheathed Grayswandir to shut her up. Luke did the same with Werewindle.

"There's a lesson there somewhere," Luke said. "Damned if I can see what it is, though."

"They're brother and sister weapons, you know, with a certain magic in common. In fact, they've a powerful secret in common," Oberon said. "Tell him, Corwin."

"It's a dangerous secret, sir."

"The time has come for it to be known. You may tell him."

"All right," I said. "Back in the early days of creation, the gods had a series of rings their champions used in the stabilization of Shadow."

"I know of them," Luke said. "Merlin wears a spikard."

"Really," I said. "They each have the power to draw on many sources in many shadows. They're all different."

"So Merlin said."

"Ours were turned into swords, and so they remain."

"Oh?" Luke said. "What do you know?"

"What do you deduce from the fact that they can do you harm when another weapon cannot?"

"Looks as if they're somehow involved in our enchantment," I ventured.

"That's right," Oberon said. "In whatever conflict lies ahead—no matter what side you are on—you will need exotic protection against the oddball power of someone like Jurt."

"Jurt?" I said.

"Later," Luke told me. "I'll fill you in."

I nodded.

"Just how is this protection to be employed. How do we get back to full permeability?" I asked.

"I will not say," he replied, "but someone along the way here should be able to tell you. And whatever happens, my blessing—which is probably no longer worth much—lies on both of you."

We bowed and said thanks. When we looked up again, he was gone.

"Great," I said. "Back for less than an hour and involved in Amber ambiguity."

Luke nodded.

"Chaos and Kashfa seem just as bad, though," he said. "Maybe the state's highest function is to grind out insoluble problems."

I chuckled as we moved on, regarding ourselves in dozens of pools of light. For several paces nothing happened, then a familiar face appeared in a red-framed oval to my left.

"Corwin, what a pleasure," she said.

"Dara!"

"It seems that my unconscious will must be stronger than that of anyone else who wishes you ill," she said. "So I get to deliver the best piece of news of all."

"Yes?" I said.

"I see one of you lying pierced by the blade of the other. What joy!"

"I've no intention of killing this guy," I told her.

"Goes both ways," Luke said.

"Ah, but that is the deadly beauty of it," she said. "One of you must be run through by the other for the survivor to regain that element of permeability he has lost."

"Thanks, but I'll find another way," Luke said. "My mom, Jasra, is a pretty good sorceress."

Her laughter sounded like the breaking of one of the mirrors.

"Jasra! She was one of my maids," she said. "She picked up whatever she knows of the Art by eavesdropping on my work. Not without talent, but she never received full training."

"My dad completed her training," Luke said.

As she studied Luke, the merriment went out of her face.

"All right," she said. "I'll level with you, son of Brand. I can't see any way to resolve it other than the way I stated. As I have nothing against you, I hope to see you victorious."

"Thanks," he said, "but I've no intention of fighting my uncle. Someone must be able to lift this thing."

"The tools themselves have drawn you into this," she said. "They will force you to fight. They are stronger than mortal sorcery."

"Thanks for the advice," he said. "Some of it may come in handy," and he winked at her. She blushed, hardly a response I'd have anticipated, then she was gone.

"I don't like the tenor this has acquired," I said.

"Me neither. Can't we just turn around and go back?"

I shook my head.

"It sucks you in," I told him. "Just get everything you can out of it—that's the best advice I ever got on the thing."

We walked on for perhaps ten feet, past some absolutely lovely examples of mirror making as well as some battered old looking glasses.

A yellow-lacquered one on Luke's side, embossed with Chinese characters and chipped here and there, froze us in our tracks as the booming voice of my late brother Eric rang out:

"I see your fates," he said with a rumbling laugh. "And I can see the killing ground where you are destined to enact them. It will be interesting, brother. If you hear laughter as you lie dying, it will be mine."

"Oh, you always were a great kidder," I said. "By the way, rest in peace. You're a hero, you know."

He studied my face.

"Crazy brother," he said, and he turned his head away and was gone.

"That was Eric, who reigned briefly as king here?" Luke asked.

I nodded. "Crazy brother," I said.

We moved forward and a slim hand emerged from a steel-framed mirror patterned with roses of rust.

I halted, then turned quickly, somehow knowing even before I saw her who I would behold.

"Deirdre…" I said.

"Corwin," she replied softly.

"Do you know what's been going on as we walked along?"

She nodded.

"How much is bullshit and how much is true?" I asked.

"I don't know, but I don't think any of the others do either—not for sure."

"Thanks. I'll take all the reassurances I can get. What now?"

"If you will take hold of the other's arm, it will make the transport easier."

"What transport?"

"You may not leave this hall on your own motion. You will be taken direct to the killing ground."

"By you, love?"

"I've no choice in the matter."

I nodded. I took hold of Luke's arm.

"What do you think?" I asked him.

"I think we should go," he said, "offering no resistance—and when we find out who's behind this, we take him apart with hot irons."

"I like the way you think," I said. "Deirdre, show us the way."

"I've bad feelings about this one, Corwin."

"If, as you said, we've no choice in the matter, what difference does it make? Lead on, lady. Lead on."

She took my hand. The world began to spin around us.

Somebody owed me a chicken and a bottle of wine. I would collect.

◆ ◆ ◆

I awoke lying in what seemed a glade under a moonlit sky. I kept my eyes half-lidded and did not move. No sense in giving away my wakefulness.

Very slowly, I moved my eyes. Deirdre was nowhere in sight. My right-side peripheral vision informed me that there might be a bonfire in that direction, with some folks seated around it.

I rolled my eyes to the left and got a glimpse of Luke. No one else seemed to be nearby.

"You awake?" I whispered.

"Yeah," he replied.

"No one near," I said, rising, "except maybe for a few around a fire off to the right. We might be able to find a way out and take it—Trumps, Shadowalk—and thus break the ritual. Or we might be trapped."

Luke put a finger into his mouth, removed it, and raised it, as if testing the wind.

"We're caught up in a sequence I think we need," he said.

"To the death?" I said.

"I don't know. But I don't really think we can escape this one," he replied.

He rose to his feet.

"Ain't the fighting, it's the familiarity," I said. "I begrudge knowing you."

"Me, too. Want to flip a coin?" he asked.

"Heads, we walk away. Tails, we go over and see what the story is."

"Fine with me." He plunged his hand into a pocket, pulled out a quarter.

"Do the honors," I said.

He flipped it. We both dropped to our knees.

"Tails," he said. "Best two out of three?"

"Naw," I said. "Let's go."

Luke pocketed his quarter, and we turned and walked toward the fire.

"Only a dozen people or so. We can take them," Luke said softly.

"They don't look particularly hostile," I said.

"True."

I nodded as we approached and addressed them in Thari:

"Hello," I said. "I'm Corwin of Amber and this is Rinaldo I, King of Kashfa, also known as Luke. Are we by any chance expected here?"

An older man, who had been seated before the fire and poking at it with a stick, rose to his feet and bowed.

"My name is Reis," he said, "and we are witnesses."

"For whom?" Luke said.

"We do not know their names. There were two and they wore hoods. One, I think, was a woman. We may offer you food and drink before things begin…"

"Yeah," I said, "I'm out a meal because of this. Feed me."

"Me, too," Luke added, and the man and a couple of his cohorts brought meat, apples, cheese, bread, and cups of red wine.

As we ate, I asked Reis, "Can you tell me how this thing works?"

"Of course," he said. "They told me. When you're finished eating, if you two will move to the other side of the fire, the cues will come to you."

I laughed and then I shrugged.

"All right," I said.

Finished dining, I looked at Luke. He smiled.

"If we've got to sing for our supper," Luke said, "let's give them a ten-minute demonstration and call it a draw."

I nodded.

"Sounds good to me."

We put aside our plates, rose, moved to the fire, and passed behind it.

"Ready?" I said.

"Sure. Why not?"

We drew our weapons, stepped back, and saluted. We both laughed when the music began. Suddenly, I found myself attacking, though I had decided to await the attack and put my first energies into its counter. The movement had been thoughtless, though quite deft and speedy.

"Luke," I said as he parried, "it got away from me. Be careful. There's something odd going on."

"I know," he said as he delivered a formidable attack. "I wasn't planning that."

I parried it and came back even faster. He retreated.

"Not bad," he said, as I felt something loosened in my arm. Suddenly I was fencing on my own again, voluntarily, with no apparent control but with fear that it might be reasserted at any moment.

Suddenly, I knew that we were fairly free and it scared me. If I weren't sufficiently vicious, I might be taken over again. If I were, someone might slip in an unsolicited move at the wrong moment. I grew somewhat afraid.

"Luke, if what's happening to you is similar to what's been happening to me, I don't like this show a bit," I told him.

"Me neither," he said.

I glanced back across the fire. A pair of hooded individuals stood among the others. They were not overlarge and there was a certain whiteness within the cowl of the nearer.

"We've more audience," I said.

Luke glanced back; it was only with great difficulty that I halted a cowardly attack as he turned away. When we returned to hard combat, he shook his head.

“Couldn’t recognize either of them,” he said. “This seems a little more serious than I thought.”

“Yeah.”

“We can both take quite a beating and recover.”

“True.”

Our blades rattled on. Occasionally, one or the other of us received a cheer.

“What say we injure each other,” Luke said, “then throw ourselves down and wait for their judgment on whatever’s been accomplished. If either of them come near enough, we take them out just for laughs.”

“Okay,” I said. “If you can expose your left shoulder a bit, I’m willing to take a midline cut. Let’s give them lots of gore before we flop, though. Head and forearm cuts. Anything easy.”

“Okay. And ‘simultaneity’ is the word.”

So we fought. I stood off a bit, going faster and faster. Why not? It was kind of a game.

Suddenly, my body executed a move I had not ordered it to. Luke’s eyes widened as the blood spurted and Grayswandir passed entirely through his shoulder. Moments later, Werewindle pierced my vitals.

“Sorry,” Luke said. “Listen, Corwin. If you live and I don’t, you’d better know that there’s too much crazy stuff involving mirrors going on around the castle. The night before you came back, Flora and I fought a creature that came out of a mirror. And there’s an odd sorcerer involved—has a crush on Flora. Nobody knows his name. Has something to do with Chaos, though, I’d judge. Could it be that for the first time Amber is starting to reflect Shadow, rather than the other way around?”

“Hello,” said a familiar voice. “The deed is done.”

“Indeed,” said another.

It was the two cowled figures who had spoken. One was Fiona, the other Mandor.

“However it be resolved, good night, sweet prince,” said Fiona.

I tried to rise. So did Luke. Tried also to raise my blade. Could not. Again, the world grew dim, and this time I was leaking precious bodily fluids.

“I’m going to live—and come after you,” I said.

“Corwin,” I heard her say faintly. “We are not as culpable as you may think. This was—”

"—all for my own good, I'll bet," I muttered before the world went dark, growling with the realization that I hadn't gotten to use my death curse. One of these days…

◆ ◆ ◆

I woke up in the dispensary in Amber, Luke in the next bed. We both had IVs dripping into us.

"You're going to live," Flora said, lowering my wrist from taking my pulse. "Care to tell me your story now?"

"They just found us in the hall?" Luke asked. "The Hall of Mirrors was nowhere in sight?"

"That's right."

"I don't want to mention any names yet," I said.

"Corwin," Luke said, "did the Hall of Mirrors show up a lot when you were a kid?"

"No," I said.

"Hardly ever, when I was growing up either," Flora said. "It's only in recent years that it's become this active. Almost as if the place were waking up."

"The place?" Luke said.

"Almost as if there's another player in the game," she responded.

"Who?" I demanded, causing a pain in my gut.

"Why, the castle itself, of course," she said.

A Word from Zelazny

Asked how he wished to be remembered, Zelazny replied, "Oh, I don't know—that's a hell of a question—I don't tend to look at my stuff that way. I just look at it a book at a time. Something like the Amber books are in a different class. I try not to anticipate. I don't know what I'll be writing a few years from now. I have some ideas—I have lots of different things I want to try. I almost don't really care what history thinks. I like the way I'm being treated right now."[1]

Zelazny destroyed Castle Amber's bedrooms for a different reason—he disliked being bound by the castle maps he had authorized for *Roger Zelazny's Visual Guide to Castle Amber.* Wrecking the structure allowed him to rearrange things or fabricate new rooms. "I realized after we finished it that having something like this exist is not such a good thing for me," he said, flipping through a copy of the *Visual Guide*. "Once I described all this, it would constrain me to this outline." He grinned. "So, in the new book, there's massive destruction of the castle. They're rebuilding large parts of it and there's construction in the background the whole time." So, he managed to make the visual guide obsolete nearly as soon as it reached the bookstores? "It was a matter of self-defense."[2]

Notes

Published posthumously in 1996, this was the last Amber fiction Zelazny wrote. It was also the last complete Zelazny short work published. Zelazny's final completed collaborative novel *Psychoshop* was published in 1998. Zelazny left *Donnerjack* and *Lord Demon* incomplete. Jane Lindskold finished and published them in 1997 and 1999, respectively. The incomplete "A Secret of Amber" saw print in 2005. The misplaced 1971 mystery *The Dead Man's Brother* finally came out in 2009.

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[1] *Absolute Magnitude*, Fall/Winter 1994.

[2] *Albuquerque Journal*, Sunday, December 31, 1989, p F1, F3.

ARTICLES

ON WRITING HORROR AFTER READING CLIVE BARKER

The Stephen King Companion: Grimoire, ed. George Beahm, GB Publishing 1990.

For a short piece (I've never done a novel of this type) I sort things out in reverse. When I was reading Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* I recall thinking, over and over again, as I'd come to the end of each tale, "If I were doing something like this I'd have to begin with that final striking image and then work backwards to justify getting there." In other words, it's the way some other people are said to write mystery stories, beginning with the results and plotting back to the opening.

Atmosphere being more important in horror fiction than in many other areas of writing, I would take some time before beginning to establish in my mind the exact tone (defined as the author's attitude toward the material). Once I'd worked it out for myself I'd have set a machine into operation which would color the writing throughout from that point of view. On the practical level this would manifest in things such as choice of adjectives, sentence length and complexity, and would even influence the percentage of purely descriptive prose in the piece. This is a variation on the trick I use in mimicking someone else's style, and the name of the game is Mental Set. It beats memorizing mannerisms by a mile and a half.

Flowing from the above, for a piece of writing (horror or otherwise) in which I am building atmosphere, I also employ a device similar to one I use in composing action sequences: I write in slow-motion. What I mean by this is that if I just show what happens it plays too quickly. They tell beginning writers, "Don't tell what happened. Show what happened." Yeah. Okay. That's generally true. But for action and atmosphere you don't *just* show what happened. You show and you show… It's almost a case of telling them what you're going to tell them, telling them, and then telling them what you told them. Not quite that blatantly, and you might want to call it foreshadowing, mimesis, peripeteia or somesuch, but what you're aiming for is thoroughness with all due deliberation. Whenever I'm doing it I just flip a slow-motion switch in my mind.

So, backward-plotting, tone and pacing are my three answers to your question as to my main considerations in writing a piece of horror fiction.

Notes

This short essay originally appeared in the 250-copy limited edition *Grimoire*, a supplement to *The Stephen King Companion.* Editor George Beahm noted, "Writing is largely an intuitive process, much more from the subconscious than the conscious, and for that reason writers are reluctant to look too closely. Happily, there are writers who are in sufficient command of their craft to write about the creative process—Stephen King comes to mind, as does Harlan Ellison, and so does Roger Zelazny."

Mimesis is mimicry. **Peripetiae** are sudden reversals of fortune.

"WHEN IT COMES IT'S WONDERFUL": ART VERSUS CRAFT IN WRITING

Deep Thoughts: Proceedings of Life, The Universe and Everything XII, February 16–19, 1994, eds. Steve Setzer and Marny K. Parkin, LTU&E 1995.

I brought with me a collection of notes I've made over the years for various talks I've considered giving at different places I've gone to. I've leafed through them several times and thought first I might devote my talk to science fiction and the two cultures—the old C. P. Snow thesis—and offer a suggestion that science fiction is still probably one of the best means by which the liberal arts and scientific cultures talk to each other. It's a meeting ground of both. But it also occurred to me that this being a university setting I might talk about it from a more literary standpoint, something like Northrop Frye's four modes of characterization, pointing out that the higher modes, which were used quite a while back, are no longer used anywhere else in literature except in science fiction, and attempting to make a point that this gives us a greater degree of freedom than probably anybody writing anything except certain forms of modern poetry.

Then I said to myself, this is silly. I've talked to a lot of people here who are writing and doing a very good job of it. You have an enormous number of winners of the L. Ron Hubbard "Writers of the Future" contest. You have an enormous number of people who are not winners, but who are writing and selling, and a lot of people who are writing and not selling yet, but probably will. I was amazed to learn the proliferation of writing groups in the area.

It seems that there is such a terrific interest in writing that perhaps it would behoove me to talk more about writing than about literary theory or about the effects of the things we write on the people who read our stuff. So it occurred to me that perhaps it might be more amusing, or edifying, or perhaps even instructive, or at the outside educational, if I were to talk about such matters as have come across my experience in thirty-some years of writing, because I feel that if you write long enough you encounter just about every bizarre situation that can arise, many of them ones which one cannot even visualize from the outset.

I was saying the other night to someone when we were talking about art that I was a great admirer of Michael Whelan's, but that it was a pity that the only Michael Whelan cover I'd ever had happened to be plagiarized.

I received a copy of *Trumps of Doom* from the publisher and looked at it. This was the hardcover Arbor House edition. I thought, "Gee that looks familiar." My son walked through the room later and said, "I've seen that cover before somewhere." About a week or so later I learned that Michael Whelan's attorney had phoned the Arbor House people and said, "Do you know that you're running a Michael Whelan cover which he did for Fred Saberhagen's *Brother Berserker*, only slightly airbrushed with a few colors changed, on Roger Zelazny's *Trumps of Doom*?" This was very embarrassing because Fred happens to be a very good friend of mine, and I was usually down to his house about once a month for dinner. He had a framed copy of his cover hanging in the back hall, which I walked past dozens of times. Of course that's where I had seen it.

It was kind of a pity because the fellow was just out of art school a few months, I think, and had gotten commissions to do something like three covers. The other two were *bona fide*, original covers he'd done for other publishers. I don't think they were science-fiction related. He had this one science fiction cover for which he had no idea. Just thought he'd pull something at random and change it a little bit and get away with it, not knowing he was ripping off possibly the best known artist in the area. Needless to say, he will never illustrate in the area again now that word has gotten around about him.

That was my first exposure to plagiarism. Another one was much more interesting. I came back from a vacation visiting a relative in Hawaii. The cleaning lady came in while we were away to put the house in order, and she left me a note that said, "Your agent phoned and says not to worry. The plagiarism matter is being dealt with." I knew nothing whatsoever concerning a plagiarism matter. I called my agent and he said, "Oh yes, there was an interesting situation that came up in Detroit recently." The Detroit Automobile Dealers Association gives a spring auto show every year, and they decided this year (I forget which year this was now) to sponsor a writing contest wherein they offered a $1,000 first prize, $500 second, and $250 third and also would print the winning story in the program book for the auto show, an edition of twenty-five thousand copies. This was done.

Then the author sold reprint rights on the story to the *Detroit Free Press*, which also printed it about a week later. Then letters started coming into the Detroit Automobile Dealers Association pointing out that this story had first appeared in a collection called *Dragons of Light* edited by Orson Scott Card. It was written by Roger Zelazny and subsequently appeared in his collection *The Last Defender of Camelot*. The attorneys for the Detroit Automobile Dealers Association looked at my story and at this story with someone else's name on it and noticed that it was a verbatim copy. Not even a comma had been changed. They called my agent and said, "Look…"

Now, on the Michael Whelan thing an interesting thing had happened. Whelan's attorneys had called Arbor House and asked for a settlement, which Arbor House immediately looked at. Arbor House then said "of course it's a rip-off, we'll pay it. But we were ready to publish the book and had spent a lot of money advertising with this cover so now that we've gone this far, how much more money do you want so we can keep on using the cover?" So Whelan made out very nicely. I think he made out better than I did. I don't know. I never compared notes with him on it.

The Detroit Automobile Dealer Association's attorney said, "Look, our client's obviously conducted the contest in good faith. They couldn't check out every story to see whether it's original, but they feel badly about this. How's about we send you a check for $500 for Roger Zelazny and a letter of apology from the people who ran the contest. We'll get our money back from the person who won first place with it." (I'd feel badly if I'd come in second or third.) But I made 500 bucks, and the *Detroit Free Press*, which had reprinted it, said, "Well how's about we give you a big write-up and tell the story of what happened in the contest plus plug all your books and things so that you don't sue us?" I said, "Sure I'll take the free publicity, and you can send it out over the wire service, too."

In neither of these instances can I see any way it could have been avoided. There's no way a person in some editorial capacity can check on everything that comes in. But looking at it from the other side, there are ways one can protect oneself.

I once got a letter from a fellow who took a writing course at the University of New Mexico from Tony Hillerman, whom I happened to know. He had just read *Eye of Cat* and felt that a short story involving Navajos the fellow had written some time back and submitted to Tony was ripped off in the book. The only way I could have seen his story, of course, would have been if Tony had shown it to me. He had asked Tony, and Tony had said he'd never shown anybody stories from his class. But the fellow said he'd feel encouraged as a writer if I would tell him Tony had shown me the story and I had copied parts of it. I wrote back to him and said something like, "Would you also like me to label the letter exhibit A? But no, I never heard of you until I received your letter, and I'd like to keep it that way." It made me feel bad, actually, that somebody thought I was so hard up for an idea that I'd rip off somebody taking a writing class or that Tony would let me do so.

Well, I decided to look into plagiarism a little, and I discovered two strange stories. One is that a fellow had a story published some years back in a non-science fiction magazine, which was followed about three months later by a story by Frank M. Robinson in *Amazing Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The story involved a group of anthropologists in the Middle East that were studying a desert tribe and were present when a solar eclipse occurred. All the tribesmen ran out and started banging on pots and pans until the eclipse was over. The anthropologists asked them what happened and they said a dragon was eating the sun and it was their job to keep making enough noise to drive him away so the world wouldn't remain in perpetual darkness. In the story, the anthropologists persuaded them part way through the eclipse that it was nonsense and they stopped pounding on the pots and pans, and it never got light again. The two stories were identical. The guy whose story appeared first sued Frank Robinson. Robinson was able to prove that he had no access whatsoever to the fellow's story. The date on the contract proved he had actually written and sold his story sometime back. Access is the key to proving plagiarism.

What happened is that both Robinson and the other fellow had read a report in *The New York Times* of an actual instance like this, except that the anthropologists didn't persuade the natives to stop beating pots and pans at the sun. They both happened to read the same account and say this is a good story idea if we just gave it one little twist. They both happened to think of that same twist. I probably would have thought of it if I had heard the same story. The first guy was very incensed because his story came out first, but there was no access, no ill will or anything. The charges were dropped, and everybody growled and went away.

But then there was another instance, one that bothered me. Years ago Arthur C. Clarke received a story in the mail from someone saying, "I've sent this story to a number of magazines. Nobody wants it. Would you take a look at it and tell me what's wrong with it?" Clarke actually read the story and wrote the fellow back a letter giving a list of things he felt were wrong with the story and returned it to the author, and that was it. Some years later Clarke wrote a story which was somewhat similar to that. He professed he didn't even remember having seen the story, but the guy sued him, and in court he produced Clarke's letter and said, "I have evidence that Clarke had access to my story." Clarke was able successfully to defend himself based on his reputation alone; he didn't need to do anything like that. But that bothered me.

According to my attorney and some people I know who have been sued for plagiarism or who have sued somebody else for plagiarism, the key to it is not just showing that there was some similarity between one thing and another. The key seems to be in showing that the party who came in on it second had access to the first party's material, which is usually hard to prove. Harlan [Ellison] has been very lucky on that and has collected a number of times, but all of this plagiarism business made me very nervous. I mean, I've seen it from both sides—I've been accused of it and I've been plagiarized. So I asked my attorney what I should do, and he said whenever anybody sends you a story, just return it with a covering letter stating I'm returning your story unread because my attorney will not permit me to read anything that is uncopyrighted and unpublished. He said I shouldn't read anything unless I was in a formal teaching situation, was editing something, or perhaps was judging a contest. So I made a practice not to do it after that.

Then one day in the mail I received a package containing a story from a guy I never heard of and a covering letter that struck me strangely. He said, "Mr. Zelazny, I'm a professional writer, but I'm not a science fiction writer. You probably wouldn't recognize the name because for years I've been a ghostwriter of Hollywood scripts. Most of them were very bad movies anyway, low budget things, but I made a career of it. Now I want to go into fiction writing, as I've always liked science fiction. I've written a bunch of science fiction stories. I sent them all around to every magazine in the business, and nobody wanted any of them. This one I think is the best of the lot. Would you tell me what's wrong with it? I think it's a good story. I don't know why a person wouldn't want to buy it." I said to myself, "No, I shouldn't read it, but I will read just the first sentence to see if he has a good narrative hook," and I did, and it was a very good narrative hook that got me through the first paragraph. I said, "Well I'll read the first page and not tell him I read it." I kept going and read the whole bloody story. I softened like this, but when I read it I couldn't find anything wrong with it. I thought it was a perfectly competent story. I was sure that had I or any of a number of professional authors written that story it would have sold.

I guess all this is preamble leading up to this advice for everybody here who is writing or trying to write. Sometimes the story is perfectly good. Sometimes it is a perfectly acceptable story, and if you were a little bit better known it would sell, but it's not quite good enough for your first sale—your break-in story. I could have written him back a letter nit-picking about some little things, saying you ought to fix this or that, but frankly, I don't think it would have made any difference.

So I wrote him a letter and said, "Look, I normally don't read manuscripts, but for some reason I read yours—probably because it was interesting. I can't find anything wrong with it, but it's a sort of gray story. It's not a brilliant white story. It's not a dark, stupid story. It's a story I think you ought to place in a drawer and forget about for a while and keep writing. If you do, you'll probably start selling if you're persistent. After you've been selling a while, pick the editor who's buying most of your stuff and take this story out again and send it to that editor, even if that editor rejected it in the past. I think you'll sell it."

I forgot all about it. A year and a half later I got a copy of *Amazing Stories* with a little bookmark in it. I opened to that and there was the story unchanged. All the author had written was, "You were right," and he'd autographed it.

I don't know what the moral is there. I'm still very leery of plagiarism and lawsuits. I will not normally read stuff that comes in through the mail that way, though the one time I did I actually wound up giving someone some good advice. I offer that good advice to anyone here who also wants to write because I think it is good to bear in mind that it's not always what you write, but it is sometimes when you write it in your career that can make a difference. It may well be that someone sitting here right now has been trying to write for some time and has been writing stuff that will be perfectly acceptable a couple of years down the line when he or she pulls it from the files and resubmits it somewhere after establishing a bit of a track record. But the market has become so very competitive these days, with so many really good writers trying to break in, that the competition is considerably stiffer than it was back in the days when I started. About the only thing I can counsel is persistence, daily writing, a steady submission of stories, and a kind of a hard skin emotionally for rejections that may come by. That leads to certain other considerations.

We were talking on one of the panels the other day about distinctions to be drawn between art and craftsmanship and what may be said for creativity, for coming up with a brilliant, clever idea. You'll find that many of the stories you read are not bright, new ideas but are variations on older ideas. The great virtue of stories in print may well lie with the author's skill in characterization or dialogue or an interesting writing style. It behooves one to ascertain one's strongest points. But one can go to extremes in anything, and this reminds me of one summer when I taught at the Indiana University Writer's Conference.

I devoted a talk to the fact that I thought it was wrong for a writer to find his or her strongest point and capitalize on that completely. That is, if you are extremely good at writing dialogue, and you do a story which just scintillates with brilliant dialogue, and they buy it and ask you to write another one, and you start making a career of writing stories with clever dialogue, eventually you're hurting yourself because you're getting hypertrophied. You are capitalizing on your virtues without attempting to develop your weaknesses up to a point of at least competence. So I have always felt that, when you are finally in a position as a professional selling things regularly, you should take the chance of writing from weakness whenever you can. If you are good at clever gimmick stories but not so good at characterization, try stories which rely on the characterization more than the gimmick. If you are not good at writing good descriptive background scenes, but can carry a story with sketchy simulations of the background, sometimes it would be good to try to devote a few paragraphs to laying in a stronger background than you might absolutely need. I've always felt this to be true.

I had a fellow in the class that day who hadn't been around before—the boyfriend of one of the girls who was taking the class. He was a Hollywood scriptwriter. He came up to me afterwards and said, "I hear what you're saying, and I think you're right. I'm very good at dialogue because that's all I do. I write scripts. We don't have to worry about characterization because a script is like a novel inside-out. We just come out and tell them in the first paragraph this is what this guy is like. We don't have to show it through a bunch of action. We just say he was in the military previously for X years, is Y years old, and so on. After that paragraph the actor who is to play that part knows exactly what the character is like and he just gets on with the talk, and the talk is where I make my money. Frankly, if I really wanted to be a fine writer I would attempt to learn my weaknesses and strengthen them. But I don't want to be a good writer. I just want to be a good script writer." He had a valid point. This was all he wanted to do and my advice just didn't apply to him, but I feel that it is worthwhile for most of you.

If you want to write something you are really going to be remembered for, a book that will stay in print for generations, you will have a better chance of doing so if you strengthen yourself in all areas rather than just one area. Actually I'm talking about craftsmanship. I'm talking about learning techniques. I'm not talking about courting the muse and coming up with brilliant ideas, because frankly this is something that only comes to you with the development of the discipline of craft.

I am reminded of a wonderful book I read years ago called *The Popular Book* by James D. Hart, a University of California professor. The book came out from the University of California Press in 1951. It's a history not of great literature but of books that were extremely popular throughout American history. The anecdote that fascinates me most is about the man I have a secret admiration for—Timothy Shay Arthur, who amazingly in the 1840s wrote five percent of everything published in America. He was the most prolific author of his day. If they wanted temperance books, he'd grind out temperance books by the ream. If abolition suddenly became a popular notion politically, he'd be writing abolition tracts. If somebody wanted frontier novels, he'd be writing frontier novels. Everybody was reading Timothy Shay

Arthur. If you asked the man on the street then who was the best author of the day, he'd most likely say Timothy Shay Arthur.

During the time Timothy Shay Arthur was writing five percent of everything published in America, Henry David Thoreau was writing *Walden*. Nobody read *Walden* except a handful of New England intellectuals, most of whom were personal friends of the author. Yet, if we look back now through the history of American letters we discover that apart from the small song called "Father, Dear Father, Come Home with Me Now" from a temperance play called *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, Timothy Shay Arthur is not remembered. But everybody knows of Thoreau's *Walden*. Even if they haven't read *Walden*, they at least know it is a story about a guy who went and lived in the woods and reflected on the nature of society and on nature itself. His book persisted. Nobody knew at the time that it was a classic. I think one is foolish to set out to try to write a classic. One just does the best job one can. But Arthur is barely remembered. Thoreau will still be read another hundred years from now.

Which leads to another consideration: Who judges in the present time? How valid are their judgments? Should you be writing to impress reviewers and critics, and even if you succeed in doing so, how lasting will their effects be upon your career? I am reminded in this regard of the fact that H. L. Mencken, American columnist, essayist, and editor for American Mercury—a fairly hip fellow on the literary scene back in the 1920s—decided to stick his neck out and write an essay on the people he thought would be remembered fifty, a hundred years down the line as the great American novelists of the 1920s. He chose three. He chose Carl Van Vechten, James Hunicher, and Clyde Brion-Davis. Everybody reads those today.

Carl Van Vechten wrote one nice book; it was called *Peter Wiffle*. He wrote six others and every book went downhill a little bit from the first one until he was writing so-so stuff at the end and he quit. He originally had been a music critic for a New York paper and he wound up writing books about cats, whom he cared about maybe more than people. I don't know. James Hunicher, unfortunately, died shortly after Mencken's essay appeared having written only one book, so we'll never really know. Clyde Brion-Davis just never caught on the same way as the people Mencken did not mention in his essay, such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos. They were writing all around Mencken at the time, and Mencken just didn't feel they were doing as fine a job as Van Vechten, Hunicher, and Brion-Davis. It's a very slippery thing to count upon your contemporaries for judgment.

I feel the only person that you must please as a writer, really, is your own self at its deepest levels. I feel that inspiration is not a thing that can always be present. It can be courted, but it cannot necessarily be achieved by an act of will. The next best thing to inspiration is a solid grasp of one's craft and an honest attempt to apply it, and apply it as fully as one can in telling the best story one can with the materials one has at hand on those occasions when inspiration is lacking. I feel, too, that to do this one must also cultivate the entire spectrum of tools in the writer's box of craft equipment. One has to learn to wield them all whether one does it to any great frequency or not. This is not proof against plagiarism. This is not proof against bad reviews. This is not proof against your contemporaries saying they don't understand it. But it's the only touchstone I think you have. Which does not mean I would not be willing to rewrite anything an editor requests, unless they asked me to do something I absolutely felt would castrate a book. (Not to be sexist about these things, but one gets nervous about what is most painful to oneself.)

I feel that whenever you are considering a story, if something odd occurs to you (as with *A Night in the Lonesome October*, when I decided to tell the story from the viewpoint of the dog), you should be willing to take a chance. I think that is part of the creative spirit speaking to one, saying, "I'm not going to interrupt too long, Zelazny—take a chance, write the story from a dog's viewpoint and make Jack the Ripper a somewhat sympathetic guy." Things like that I had thought of in the past but lacked the nerve to show it.

I wrote a book early in my career called *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, which was not intended for publication at all. I wrote that book solely to teach myself writing tricks. I said "nobody's going to want this book because I'm going to throw in all sorts of things. I just want to learn." I decided I would write a chapter in free verse, I decided I would introduce many more characters than one should in a story that long, and I decided I would write the final chapter as a one-act play. When I finished the thing I said, "well nobody's going to want it but I'm glad I wrote it." I mentioned it to Samuel R. Delany. One time he had lunch with an editor at Doubleday and the editor phoned me and said, "I think you have a book you've never showed me." Doubleday by then had published quite a number of my things. I said, "Yeah, but you wouldn't like it, Larry." He said, "Let me see it anyway." I said, "You won't like it." He said, "That's okay, let me see it." So I sent it to him and two weeks later he called me up and said, "I love it, I'm buying it." Now if I'd gotten the idea for that book and intended to write it for commercial publication, I wouldn't have written it that way. I wouldn't have taken all those dumb chances, but that was one of the things that made me realize that sometimes you have to take a chance. It's part of the fun of the game, too. You might get knocked down on it but it's one of the ways you grow.

On the lighter side of it, I've sometimes refused to grow in other directions. I remember back when I was writing for Doubleday, on a perverse whim in one of the Amber novels I wrote a very graphic sex scene between Corwin and Dara. I had no intention of leaving it in the final version of the book because the tone was way off. I just did it for the fun of it. I wanted to see what the editor would say, because I'd heard it said that Doubleday claimed they didn't censor anything, but on the other hand they didn't like stuff like that. So I sent the book into them, and they called me up and said, "Zelazny, you've got this scene on pages such and such. (I already knew the page numbers.) Now look, we're not trying to censor you or anything like that, but about two thousand copies of your hardcover sales these days are going to libraries. (This was in the early '70s.) Most librarians consider science fiction to be a juvenile form of literature. If they saw a graphic scene like that in it they wouldn't buy it because the readership they feel is fairly young, so I'm not asking you to take it out. I'm telling you that if you leave it in it might cost you a lot of library sales." "That's okay," I said, "I'll take it out." Because I had in mind (it's really perverse, I don't know why they put up with me) putting a scene like that into every Amber book and letting them call me and talk me into taking it out, then when I had enough of them, doing an article for some men's magazine called "Scenes I Was Asked to Cut." It would be a semi-scholarly, polite, gentlemanly way of introducing a basically pornographic article in the men's magazine without making it look as if they're publishing anything dirty. However, after the first time the novelty wore off and I never did it again. I tell you that to tell you more how my mind works, but also a thing about the publishing industry. It has been fun over the years.

Writers like other funny things. Of course most of you who are interested in writing know by now that when you start out you're writing on spec. You're writing stories or books, then trying to hustle them. Once you get accepted beyond a certain point, you have an agent who goes in and hustles the book first and gets the contract and then you write the book. Again the perversity of my mind sometimes amazes me. I don't know if I can always connect it with the creative process or not. It's the dark side of the force. But when they start asking me for outlines… Doubleday was good about not asking me for outlines, probably because the advances were so low in those days. They didn't have much to lose. But I started writing for other people as well, and they wanted outlines. I discovered that all I had to do was say some general things about what the book was about, and work out one key scene that I intended to put in, then devote most of the outline to that one key scene. Then I'd sit down and write whatever I wanted, so long as I stuck that scene in somewhere. This worked for me fine. I got very good at faking outlines until I realized I was cheating myself because I had never really learned how to write an outline. There came a point when I needed one, and I had to actually sit down and learn how to outline.

Tony Hillerman, by the way, still doesn't outline. When he had to teach that course in creative writing, he came to a luncheon with a bunch of writers and said, "Does anybody here have a spare outline? I'm supposed to teach a class next week on outlining and I've never outlined a book. If anybody has an outline for a book I can borrow I can at least show them an outline." He borrowed an outline from Lois Duncan who writes juveniles and went in and lectured successfully on outlining. He still doesn't outline, but the bottom line is, as they say, your track record. If your stuff sells, you can get away with all sorts of things that you couldn't get away with when they were just taking a chance on you.

The place where I really had to learn to outline was when I started getting much larger advances and they were getting nervous. One editor told me, in confidence, that an outline really just provides a gentlemanly way of rejecting a novel you don't like, because you can always find something in a novel that doesn't jibe with the outline, and you can build it up from a molehill into a mountain and then ditch the book on that basis without getting into a big argument with the author. Another place where outlines really came in handy, I learned, was when I started collaborating on books with other people, since then you both really do need to know what's going to happen. Some of the books I have written in collaboration, like the ones with Bob Sheckley, I had to outline. Bob is a person who just can't outline.

I learned my skill in outlining basically from Fred Saberhagen, who's a magnificent outliner.

I look back over my own career, and counting some collaborations and some books of poetry and some children's books, along with the stuff I'm best known for in fantasy and science fiction, I've written around fifty books. Someone asked me my favorites and I said there were five—*This Immortal, Lord of Light, Eye of Cat, Doorways in the Sand*, and recently *A Night in the Lonesome October*. Some are heavier than others, but they're all books where I took chances. Taking chances is important. You can't always play conservative. If you do, you fall in a rut. If you fall in a rut, you start to die creatively.

Someone asked about my favorites at a convention in England last fall at Leeds. I listed those five, and he said, "But you've written fifty books." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Sturgeon's Law." Smart-assed Brit! He said, "No, no, I didn't mean the other ninety percent was crappy." I said, "I know what you mean, but there is some truth to it." Will Cuppy once said, in *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody*, that history can't be working in high gear at all times. Some parts of history are worth more than others for one's intellectual regard, and I feel the same is true for writers. You can't always be working in high gear at all times, but if you're a professional you're supporting yourself, or yourself and a family through your writing skills. You have to write all the time whether you feel like it or not. On those occasions when you do not feel like it, you have to rely on the craft rather than the art and inspiration. I sometimes think too much is made of inspiration. It'll come when it comes, and when it comes it's wonderful.

Notes

Zelazny delivered this Guest of Honor speech at Life, The Universe, and Everything XII, which took place in Salt Lake City February 16–19, 1994.

WARRIORS AND DREAMS

Warriors of Blood and Dream, AvoNova 1995. (as "Introduction")

A teacher affects eternity;
he can never tell where his influence stops.
HENRY ADAMS

1

In the only photo I have of Phil Cleverley, he is throwing me to the ground with an effortless aikido technique which perfectly controlled my attack. He is somewhere in his mid-thirties. His shoulder-length hair is unmussed, his *hakama* draped, almost artistically, over hip, thigh, leg. My feet are high in the air; his expression is emotionless above his neat beard. The photo was taken by a passing photographer for the *New Mexican*, out early on a Saturday morning looking for human interest material.

It was a balmy spring day, sunny, with a bit of birdsong and a small breeze about us, as I recall. There had been some rain the night before but the ground was not wet, only a little damp. There would be a few grass stains on the *gi*. Nothing that a little bleach wouldn't remedy. Nobody else had shown up for class that morning in the park, and I was getting a private lesson. I think I had my brown belt at the time.

Phil taught a very soft style of aikido; that is, there were no jerks, wrenching movements, hard grabs—except from the person doing the attacking. There were times when I didn't even feel his touch, just felt myself suddenly off-balance, turning, falling. Not at all like the judo I had studied back in college. As effective, though.

I spent seven summers with Phil in that place, Patrick Smith Park, between Canyon Road and West Alameda, in Santa Fe, New

Mexico. April through October, usually. Winters, Phil would rent space in a dojo, Kerry Li's or Cody Templeton's, where we would throw and be thrown on mats. He liked the grassy ground of the park best, however—often remarking that it was our real school—partly because one is seldom attacked for real when standing on a mat, partly because he was very fond of the outdoors. I never learned till the day of his funeral that he'd been an Eagle Scout as a kid.

Soft style. Hard style… I remember Bill Gavel, a former Marine unarmed combat instructor, telling me in my earliest judo classes that when you are pulled you push, that when you are pushed you pull. He taught a lot of pure combat stuff, too, as opposed to the sport, things involving crushing larynxes, breaking necks and spines, and it all seemed good and useful, and the push-pull business really did work—after lots of practice. Later, Phil was to tell me that when you are pushed or pulled you turn. He was aware of the push-pull response as well, and when I questioned him upon the distinction he'd shrugged and said, "Not better. Not worse. Just different."

Phil had come to aikido with a background in Shotokan karate, kempo, and t'ai chi. One day when I was hunting for more distinctions he told me, "In karate when you block and counterpunch, you reject the attack, you reject the attacker. In aikido you embrace the attack, you embrace the attacker, and you turn."

"What's wrong with rejecting the attack and the attacker?" I'd asked.

He shook his head.

"Nothing," he said. "Neither way is right or wrong. They're just different approaches. Look at them as metaphors."

So, later, I did tae kwon do for six months, twice a week, on the side, to improve my attacks for aikido. It was not so much that I wanted the first, beginner's, belt in that art, but Phil's attacks—and those of the other people in the class who had done some form of karate—were so much cleaner than my own, that I felt a need to improve my attacking half of things. While it is true that aikido is mainly a defensive art, half of the time in class is spent being an attacker (*uke*), so as to give one's partner (*nage*) a chance to practice the defenses.

The concept of blocking and attacking was not totally unfamiliar to me. It had been there when I fenced for four years, as an undergraduate at Case Western Reserve (then just Western Reserve, as it didn't get together with Case till 1967), receiving varsity letters in the sport in my sophomore, junior, and senior years. I'd taken fencing in lieu of regular Phys Ed, as I couldn't stand team sports. Individual performance was something else, though. After the first year, the teacher had suggested I try out for the team, and I did. I wound up as captain of the épée squad in my final year, possibly by virtue of a certain double-jointedness which permitted my drawing my elbow back at an unnatural-seeming angle out of reach of riposte while going for a wrist touch. And parrying and attacking, beating a blade aside and attacking, is but an extended version of blocking and punching: Reject the attack, reject the attacker. Point!

Somewhere along the line, I learned the Japanese martial arts term for what I'd always sought in all affairs: *suki*. It means an opening. One can get all philosophical about yin and yang and mutual arisings, but basically it means that whatever you do you make yourself vulnerable somewhere. A skilled defensive player invites the attack and moves into the opening, the *suki,* which it creates. Even powerful, focused blows create their own *suki*, for strength is put forth in a wavelike pattern—exert, relax, exert, relax—and a soft-style martial artist will tell you that every moment of strength in the hard-style player's effort is followed by a moment of weakness. Avoid or parry the blow, and there is the *suki*. The soft stylist tries to avoid personal moments of strength and weakness himself by letting his strength flow at the same level at all times. No exertion, no lapse, enter the opening, embrace the attack, turn.

I am facing one of the pupils in the class I taught. I ask her for a munetski *punch to my midsection. Initially, I face her squarely. As the attack commences I am moving forward and turning. If the punch connects, it does not matter. It will roll off of me in the course of the rotation. I apply the technique. I reverse my turning. She is on the ground.*

Hard, soft, push-pull, reject-reject, circular-linear. None of this was unfamiliar, once I understood what the terms meant in practice. "The martial arts are a microcosm of the big world," Phil said. "It's all there."

"So what do you do if the person attacking you has studied silat or capoeira or some kung fu form you've never heard of?" I asked him.

"You can't learn them all," he told me. "I'll tell you one thing not to do, though: Never enter another man's universe, because in there he's God."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't try to play by his rules. He knows them better than you do. Try to make him enter your universe."

"How?"

"You might have to provoke his *ki*."

"What do you mean?"

He gave me the finger.

End of Zen parable.

2

Winter, in the late fifties: The skies were ashen and sober and there were small ridges of snow at the curbsides on East 185th Street. It was a Friday. My parents always did the week's shopping on Fridays, in the stores that lined that thoroughfare. While they were about it I browsed the Woolworth's and Neisner's five-and-dimes, the one bookstore, and the drugstores' magazine racks. At one point, I waited for a break in the traffic and then hurried to cross the street. Partway over I struck a patch of ice and felt my feet go out from under me. I was pleased that I did a breakfall without thinking. My right arm struck the pavement at a forty-five-degree angle out from my body simultaneous with my turning my hip and spreading the force of the impact along the outside of my right leg just as my left foot made contact with the street. It was a good breakfall, and I picked myself up, brushed myself off, and continued on to the store I was headed for. I recall thinking, "At least I've gotten this much out of judo." I'd been doing it for a year or so then.

A few years ago I was walking down my steep, blacktop driveway one winter day to pick up the morning papers when I struck a patch of ice. This time, as I felt myself slip forward I relaxed my upper body; it felt as if everything from my shoulders down to my waist instantly drained into my center. I sank into the slide and rode with it as if I were skiing. When I came to the edge of the ice, I stepped off, straightened to my full height, and continued on down the hill. Later I tried it again intentionally, just for the hell of it, and I responded the same way each time. I embraced it and went with it. I had been doing aikido for three or four years at that point.

One does the same *ukemi* (breakfalls) in aikido as one does in judo or jujutsu; one also does a rolling version which brings one back to one's feet. The appropriate species of *ukemi* depends on the vector of the throw, and after a time one's body just knows which sort to employ, from somewhere down at the level of the spinal nerves. One learns to fall from one's center as well as to move from it in the vertical.

One member of my aikido class was Leroy Yerxa, Jr., son of the old Ziff-Davis science fiction writer of that name. Later, widowed, his mother had remarried—William Hamling, who soon had Leroy reading the slush pile of his magazine, *Imagination.* Leroy and I are the same age, and he was reading it in his teens at the same time I was writing and trying to sell. It is likely that he'd rejected some of my early stories, though I've never mentioned the possibility to him. I wonder, after all these years, whether he was the one who penned me the "Sorry, try again" on one of those early slips. One of life's odd turnings or returnings.

Behaviorism strikes me as an awfully cynical view of human nature: We run the maze because we're paid to, or because we fear the consequences if we don't. But, on the other hand, I've often wondered whether Freud himself believed, as so many of his followers seemed to, that every human action is the result of some hidden compulsion. I wondered whether some people might not simply choose values and conduct themselves in accordance with them. Or was that too naive? I remember my Political Science professor, Dr. Hotz, cautioning the class never to place too much trust in any system which relied heavily on the rationality of the human animal for its operation. He refused to guess as to the exact nature and extent of human irrationality. Just being aware of its existence is sufficient, he'd once told me. It was obviously there, though, I later came to realize, as humanity's collective *suki*.

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I was impressed by Noel Pertin's book, *Giving Up the Gun* ("Japan's Reversion to the Sword, 1543-1879"), wherein he tells of firearms first being introduced into that country in 1543 and during the next thirty-some years pretty much replacing the sword save for a few diehard samurai. But this produced a reaction, when the warlords realized that they could spend years training great fighting men and then have them shot down by someone who'd learned only how to aim and fire, before the warriors could even close with them. So, the last engagement of the period in which firearms played a major role was the Shimabara Rebellion in 1637, wherein Christianity lost its last chance for success in that country. Afterward, the warlords licensed all of the gunmakers, regulated and purchased their total output, and locked the weapons up in warehouses; and the samurai went back to fencing, the monks to making arrows, the smiths to armoring. Firearms were then used only for hunting and display. It wasn't until the breaking of the samurai in the Satsuma Rebellion in the late 1870s that firearms came back—this time to stay—well over two centuries later. The author makes no overt comparisons concerning this and any voluntary abandonment of nuclear weapons; he simply describes what once happened, resulting in a culture's putting aside a form of military technology.

But never place too much trust in any system which relies… I am reminded by memories of my Morgenthau-trained mentor. And there are plenty of holes to be found in attempted comparisons of one culture with another.

I do find stories like this fascinating, though, possibly only because I'm a technology junkie. The Greeks had an aeoliple, a rotating steam-powered novelty machine. With that technology, they could easily have learned to distill wine and make brandy, adding to the amenities (not to be confused with the Eumenides), but look how long the wait for spirits really was. The interaction of technology and society is one of the fascinations science fiction has always held for me. Even if there are no easy answers.

While doing push hands with a friend a while back I gave a very liberal answer to a political question he'd asked me, and it made me think of something much more general.

People have told me that they can't tell my politics from my stories. The reason is something that probably smacks of perversity, save that I was the way that I am long before I'd thought it through: When the country's political climate is conservative I tend to grow liberal. When it swings the other way I find myself feeling more conservative. This goes back to a basic mistrust of extremes. I don't know whether, ultimately, this makes me radical or extremely conservative. More likely, it shows me as being basically mistrustful of both government and the temper of the times in general. I am aware of a somewhat paranoid element in my makeup when it comes to anyone or anything capable of exercising power over me. Whether this reaction is push-pull or turning, it is hard to say. Whether it is hard style or soft style depends upon how active, and in what ways, I choose to become on any matter. I mistrust principles, too, and tend to stick to values. That is as close as I can come to a principle.

"Aikido is purely defensive," Phil told me one day, as yellow and gold cottonwood leaves blew by us in the park, "teaching one to respond to aggression. But when does an attack really begin? When the other person takes a swing at you? Or when that person forms the intent to do so? Are there ways of detecting this intent before it becomes action?"

"If you've got an example, please give it to me," I said.

"I once worked in a hospital," he responded, "where a patient who seemed disturbed cursed me and began moving toward me while we were waiting for an elevator. That might be taken as an intent to attack."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I raised my hands before me," he said, "and I smiled."

"And the man?"

"He changed his mind. Maybe it was the hands. Maybe it was the smile."

I read *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking a while back, because I feel obliged to read popular books in this area when written by anyone with such impressive credentials. While most of the book summarized general matters familiar to everyone who writes science fiction, the final chapters, which gave his cosmological thinking, were of interest. Even more interesting, however, was the man's triumph of sorts over that terrible wasting disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—Lou Gehrig's disease—which, while it racked his body, did not stop his mind in its turning through time, space, gravitation, from the quantum to the relativistic, in search of unities. In *Neuro* ("Life on the Frontlines of Brain Surgery and Neurological Medicine"), author David Noonan says:

> ...[I]t is generally recognized that ALS has three different rates of progression: the typical rate, in which the patient survives two to three years; an accelerated rate, in which death occurs in a matter of months or even weeks; and a very slow rate, in which the patient survives for ten years, twenty years, or even longer.

One doesn't know whether to bless or curse in a case like Dr. Hawking's. One can but wonder at the warrior heart that continues to face the cosmos down that slow rate, working, working for maximum understanding, unable to push-pull or reject his own accelerated entropy, able only to turn, between riddles personal and universal.

"Once some guys attacked me on the street," Phil said one chilly evening after class as we pulled on street clothes and gathered our gear at the picnic table. "One of them threw a Coke bottle. I blocked automatically. The bottle shattered against my left forearm—still a few slivers in there—and the pieces flew off to the side. It was rather spectacular. I must have looked as if I knew what I was doing, because they backed off."

"Sounds like rejecting the attack rather than turning with it," I suggested.

"Yes, it was," he agreed. "Everything you know in the martial arts eventually flows together. What you're left with is your own style. You will do what is most appropriate."

Phil died on Monday, February 26, 1990, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, at the typical rate. It had eroded him for about two years. He turned with it, embracing the attacks and putting forth the best responses he could to each of its grapplings, with his own diminishing energies. He did block and punch, too; he did push and pull. But he had no choice but to enter its universe, to play by its rules. I taught his classes, under his guidance, during that time—and later by general consent of the class itself when he was no longer able to come in, periodically reporting back to him by telephone and seeking advice. I continued the teaching for several years after that, also.

He was buried in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Thursday, March 1. He was survived by an amazing lady, Karen, a lovely daughter from a previous marriage, Carissa, and by all of those whom he had taught. Leroy Yerxa, Jr., Jamfi Corley (herself an aikido, kenjutsu, and aikijutsu *sensei*), Claudia Hallowell, and I were at the service and the graveside with the family. Donna Lubell (a karate *sensei*) was there in spirit, as were some of the others I could not reach in time, or who could not travel the distance.

Notes

In the 1990s Zelazny wrote an autobiographical essay "Aikido Black"; the title refers to the black belt he earned in aikido. Jane Lindskold quoted from it in her book *Roger Zelazny* (Twayne, 1993). Zelazny used excerpts from it in creating this introduction to his 1995 anthology *Warriors of Blood and Dream*. The full manuscript of his autobiography remains unpublished and in a private collection.

Various martial arts clothing (*hakama*, *gi*) and techniques (*munetski*, silat, capoeira, etc.) are mentioned in the article but will not be defined here. Hans Joachim **Morgenthau** did pioneering work in international relations theory, diplomacy, and political realism.

"...AND CALL ME ROGER"

THE LITERARY LIFE OF ROGER ZELAZNY, PART 6

by Christopher S. Kovacs, MD

1991

Amber Universe *Not* to Be Shared

Zelazny said repeatedly that he did not want anyone else to write in the Amber universe. In a 1991 interview he said, "I don't like the idea of anyone else getting their hands on the material so I'm not going to [allow it]. The closest I came was, I permitted two children's books, choose your own adventure type things, to be written using Amber material with the understanding that the person who did the writing would not change my characters in any way and wouldn't do anything that would damage the narrative line and move the story, that sort of thing. That was all, but apart from that I wouldn't want to get into anything that I felt would change the universe."[1] Soon after, Zelazny authorized a second exception: *Amberzine*, limited to 1,000 copies per issue, showcasing fan fiction that had to be confined to retellings of Amber role-playing campaigns. Zelazny insisted on limited distribution and the rule about fan fiction to protect his copyright. However, this made little difference to the reader since these "campaign accounts" appeared as stories—often alongside Zelazny's own Amber short stories—and the writers never had to certify that they had based their creations on role-playing events.

Zelazny reiterated his wishes in interviews, to friends, and colleagues (Neil Gaiman, George R. R. Martin, Walter Jon Williams, Steven Brust, and others)[2–5] but his will did not forbid other writers' working in the Amber universe. Moreover, although he separated from his wife a year before his death, he did not alter any plans for his Estate. After he died, these circumstances allowed others to write about Amber. Despite the objections of Zelazny's friends and colleagues[2–4] his Estate authorized John Betancourt to write a series of Amber prequel novels. Beginning in 2001, four novels appeared and reached bestseller lists. Then publisher Byron Preiss died; his company ibooks went bankrupt, and Betancourt never wrote the contracted final installment, *Sword of Chaos*. John Colby/Brick Tower Press purchased the rights to the Amber prequels, but Betancourt said that disagreements and lack of communication among himself, the Estate, and the publisher killed the final book.[6]

Zelazny's son Trent said, "I was horrified when I found out. I knew my father never wanted any more Amber books written. George R. R. Martin called me and gave me the news… If I'd had say in the matter, I would have turned it down. If I'd had say, but the books were going to be done anyway, I would have wanted a far more accomplished writer. Bob Silverberg or Philip José Farmer or someone like that. I had no say in the matter, however, and I will never read them."[7]

An Amber Movie or Not?

Nine Princes in Amber continued to resurface as a potential motion picture. Zelazny told an interviewer that someone who used to work for 20th Century Fox had announced at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival a forthcoming Amber movie, encompassing the first two books. This unnamed company did not want Zelazny to write the screenplay.[1] In 1998 and 1999, Warner Bros. announced *Nine Princes in Amber* to be written by Ed Neumeier (*Robocop, Starship Troopers*) and co-produced by Akiva Goldsman (*Batman Forever*) and Mark Canton.[8,9] However, neither project ever materialized. Warner Bros. continues to hold rights to the title *Nine Princes in Amber*, and its domain names (www.nineprincesinamber.com or www.9princesinamber.com) redirect to the Warner Bros.' website. The Sci Fi (now Syfy) Channel announced in 2002 a 4-hour Amber mini-series written by Richard Christian Matheson (and *SciFiWeekly* later published an interview with him about it),[10,11] but that miniseries has not emerged. Trent Zelazny confirmed that various Zelazny works remain under option for motion picture or television development, but details must remain confidential while negotiations continue.[12]

"Shadow Twin"

In 1991 Zelazny perused a manuscript begun by Gardner Dozois and continued by George R. R. Martin. He mulled over joining them. "I got here a manuscript started by Gardner Dozois. Then George R. R. Martin picked it up, and I might take it from here and do that and just study, but that would be far off when I get some of these other things done. George is a very good friend of mine, he lives just a few miles from here."[1] He eventually passed on it because he was too busy, and Martin forgot about Zelazny's involvement.[13] Daniel Abraham joined Dozois and Martin to complete the novella "Shadow Twin," later expanded into *Hunter's Run.*

Collaborations with Robert Sheckley

Zelazny's 1989 encounter with Robert Sheckley at a party given by Kirby McCauley prompted a discussion about collaboration. By 1991 McCauley was agent for both authors, and he encouraged them, noting the pair's facility with humor. Zelazny said, "I'd always been very interested in [Sheckley's] brand of humor which is really off the wall and bizarre. It was our agent who brought us together by suggesting he could get us a pretty good contract to do three books together. So we talked it over and said 'Okay.' Robert pointed out that he was not good at outlining, but I'd learned so much from Fred that I said, 'I'll run a bunch of ideas by you, you find the ones you like best, grab the top one, I'll outline it, you write it in quick draft, I'll rewrite it.' And that's what we did."[14]

Zelazny told his friend Carl Yoke that the collaboration enticed him for two reasons. First, the tone would mirror the Zlaz/Yok stories he'd written with Yoke back in high school, a timbre later echoed in 1963's "The Great Slow Kings." Second, by positioning himself as the senior collaborator, he could give Sheckley more experience with novel-length stories, an arrangement which McCauley suggested and Sheckley accepted.[15]

The good versus evil conflict came from Zelazny's long list of ideas. They discussed the idea, and then Zelazny composed a detailed outline. Sheckley later acknowledged, "Yes. It was lovely having him do the whole layout and also, it was quite a straightforward story."[16] Sheckley wrote a complete first draft; Zelazny rewrote and submitted it. Their only contact was by telephone or letter. Zelazny also responded to the publisher's queries and made any changes that they wanted.[17] Archived correspondence at Syracuse University verifies this account.

Sheckley gave an interview after Zelazny's death in which he claimed to have written *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming*: "He and I only met once to talk about a possible collaborative project. We agreed on an idea, which was his, and we also agreed very rapidly. He and I got along very well and seemed to understand each other. I am very sad about his loss… For a month or more he would send me plot outlines, and I would ask him questions to clarify things for me. You say this. What does it mean? And when it came time to write, when I felt I understood the story situation, I wrote the entire book. I did a polish on it also and gave it over to Roger, and he handled any other problems that came up. He cleared up any discrepancies. If the publisher had any objections, that was his problem, not mine. And this worked well."[18] However, this account differs from the archived correspondence between Zelazny and Sheckley, the archived manuscripts from Sheckley and Zelazny, and from the interviews that Zelazny gave about the novel.

Zelazny described *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming* this way. "It's a medieval fantasy, somewhat humorous in nature. Heaven and Hell have this contest, once every thousand years, at the turning of the millennium. The side that wins is given control of human destiny for the next thousand years. Our story involves the putting together of Hell's entry for the contest: the Prince Charming story, which is done in a somewhat unusual fashion. Beyond that, I don't want to spoil the plot."[19]

As is often the case, this collaboration differed from either author's usual fare, and it proved less satisfying for fans of both. It fell short of the quirky humor from the Zlaz/Yok stories, and Zelazny was disappointed about that. The book came out in hardcover and trade paperback and later in mass market paperback. It evidently sold well enough to justify completion of the trilogy, although the hardcover of the second book was canceled. The later two volumes each came out in trade paperback, followed by mass market paperback. Overall, the three figure among Zelazny's lighter works, and none of them ranks among the best of his collaborative works.

In a 1991 introduction to a Sheckley collection, Zelazny wrote, "I have been privileged to collaborate with Robert Sheckley and have witnessed his thinking as we were about it. I was impressed by his general erudition as few have impressed me. I was amazed by his sense of the story's form. I was awed by his ability to juggle disparate characters and situations into tighter and tighter circles... I've learned a lot from him."[20] Unfortunately, their relationship deteriorated as they wrote the second and third books.

Colterglass / Wilderness

Gerald Hausman presented Zelazny with the third chapter of *Colterglass,* sparking a series of chapter exchanges. It was intermittent at first, but by 1991 they traded manuscripts every week or two. "Roger would deliver his chapters to my wife's desk, usually on a Monday. My wife Lorry worked as the receptionist at Santa Fe Preparatory School in Santa Fe, NM, where Roger's children Trent, Devin, and Shannon were enrolled. Roger would drop the kids off in his van and then step into the front office and give Lorry a mysterious manila envelope and one Scottish scone from the French Pastry Shop. I'd get the envelope that evening. It was always a perfect complement to the story, and it gave me the right inspiration for the next part. Usually, by the following Monday, Lorry would have a new manila envelope on her desk waiting for Roger."[21]

Zelazny said, "We did it as a hobby. We didn't have a contract or anything. He'd write a chapter and when I had a chance I'd write a chapter. We kicked it back and forth for a long time.[22] Later in 1991, however, he remembered his idea for *A Night in the Lonesome October* and resumed that project; it reduced time for *Colterglass.*

Where Do You Get Your Ideas?

Writers—especially science fiction and fantasy writers—find that question unimaginative but inevitable. Zelazny addressed the issue for his alma mater, Case Western Reserve. "When you make your living writing science fiction, the question you hear most frequently is 'where do you get your ideas?' I think this is a terrible question, and having compared notes with most science fiction writers in the country, I feel safe in saying that all of us agree it is a terrible question.

I have heard it from small children and from the trembling lips of the near-senescent, from people in nearly every profession, at every level of society. I once heard it in a cave in Mexico, translated from Hungarian to Spanish to English, and I saw it coming long before it came. It's not that the question is unanswerable, it is just that it does not give itself to a ready reply."[23]

Zelazny sometimes replied with a quick, funny retort. Joe Haldeman recalled convention speeches in which Zelazny declared "that every night he leaves a bowl of milk and some crackers on the back stoop; in the morning, the milk and crackers are gone, but there's a stack of crazy ideas by the empty bowl."[24] Editor David Hartwell recalled a different answer from Zelazny: "In front of a group of fans at a convention, he replied to a vacuous teenager that the *Journal of Crazy Ideas* is published quarterly in Schenectady, New York, and that when you join the Science Fiction Writers of America and become a certified professional, you get a free subscription and can use any of the ideas in the magazine instead of having to think up your own. This is one of the secrets of being a professional and one of the reasons why two different writers will have the same idea in different stories."[25] It's not clear who first used a Schenectady quip; Frank Herbert and Harlan Ellison used variations in the late 1970s, and Ellison named a postal service in "Poughkeepsie, NY," as the source.

In his essay "Beyond the Idea," Zelazny recalled his learning that a cartoonist used the Yellow Pages for inspiration. Zelazny used the Yellow Pages a few times to extrapolate future occupations; this explains how a "bait and tackle ad" allegedly inspired "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth."[26]

The "A Word from Zelazny" sections in these six volumes contain Zelazny's recollection of the preceding story's genesis. For example, in the afterword (in volume 2) to the story "Death and the Executioner" (which is actually chapter 3 of *Lord of Light*) Zelazny explains how a shaving mishap provoked him to conceive *Lord of Light.*[27] Zelazny's varied reading program undoubtedly provided myriad material that his subconscious later disassembled, synthesized, and transmuted.

At Norwescon on March 31, 1991, Zelazny again faced the inevitable question, followed by another, asking if he was running out of ideas. "There's never a shortage of ideas. I have more ideas than I'll ever be able to use in my stories. I'm a writer who keeps notes, very simple notes, just short things which remind me of longer notions… I just had a great idea [for a novel] about a week ago…but the way my work is lined up right now, I wouldn't be able to get to it for about two years. I don't know if that will be the one I'll be writing; by the time I get there I may have a better idea, or I may unearth one from my notes that I want to work on, it's hard to say. There's also this tension between wanting to write novels and wanting to write short material. Most important for me is really novelettes and novellas. I have about three story ideas I really want to work on, but then again it's going to be at least a year or so before I get to write them. Novels tend to push shorter material out to the side, just basically for economic reasons, which is a pity. But there you are."[28] The timing of these remarks suggests that the novel could have been the *Donnerjack* trilogy, inaugurated in September 1991; one of the story ideas was likely "Godson." That interview is also notable for his remark that "most important for me is really novelettes and novellas," but both his schedule and a need to rely on novels for income kept him away from that format for long intervals.

A Night in the Lonesome October

Zelazny's remark in March 1991, "I may unearth [an idea for a novel] from my notes that I want to work on," proved prophetic. In December 1991 he unearthed the notes for *A Night in the Lonesome October*, forgotten in a drawer since 1979. Agent Kirby McCauley casually mentioned that he was going to dinner with Gahan Wilson, provoking Zelazny to find his notes. Zelazny read them over, and the story haunted him. Flouting his rule to write nothing on spec or without a contract, he commenced immediately. He skipped meals and lost sleep, completing a first draft by March 1992. Initially he planned a short story or novelette, but once he started writing, it turned itself into a novel. He finished the book before he even mentioned the concept to his agent. McCauley immediately suggested that Zelazny should write it and was astounded to learn that the manuscript already existed. McCauley signed Gahan Wilson to illustrate it, fulfilling Zelazny's original 1979 vision for the project.

Having Jack the Ripper's dog narrate the tale made the book compelling. It was generally extremely well received, and many consider it to be the best of Zelazny's longer works since *Doorways in the Sand* or *Eye of Cat*. Some critics suggested that it represented his return to the experimentation exhibited in *Lord of Light*—although *A Night in the Lonesome October* was clearly far lighter fare. Zelazny said, "I feel that whenever you are considering a story, if something odd occurs to you (as with *A Night in the Lonesome October*, when I decided to tell the story from the viewpoint of the dog), you should be willing to take a chance. I think that is part of the creative spirit speaking to one, saying, 'I'm not going to interrupt too long, Zelazny—take a chance, write the story from a dog's viewpoint, and make Jack the Ripper a somewhat sympathetic guy.' Things like that I had thought of in the past but lacked the nerve to show it."[29]

He'd rationalized a similar venture in his introduction to *The Last Defender of Camelot*. "Occasionally, there arises a writing situation when you see an alternative to what you are doing, a mad, wild gamble of a way for handling something, which may leave you looking stupid, ridiculous or brilliant—you just don't know which. You can play it safe there, too, and proceed along the route you'd mapped out for yourself. Or you can trust your personal demon who delivered that crazy idea in the first place.

"Trust your demon."[30]

He also realized that his 1977 story, "Is There a Demon Lover in the House," had directly inspired the later novel. "I had once written a story involving Jack the Ripper. It was for *Heavy Metal*… I had actually skimmed a book about Jack the Ripper at the time, and I remembered that the last Ripper killings occurred in October. I said 'you have a ritual killing situation and October. What's special about October? Well, Halloween, but there's a Halloween every year.' I was looking for something to distinguish it. I said, 'well, there's not a Halloween with a full moon every year. That could make it special.' That's when I got the rough idea for a sort of game. A stylized duel between two sides involving something that would culminate on Halloween."[22] A full moon appeared over London on October 31 in 1887, 1925, 1944, 1955, and 1974; the next occurrence will be in 2020.[31] Halloween 1887 fits the timeline of both Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper.

The novel's title refers to the poem "Ulalume" by Edgar Allan Poe. Zelazny's book is rich with borrowed characters—some obvious and others tantalizingly familiar—from real life and classics of literature and screen. The dedication provides an important clue as to their identities: "To—Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H. P. Lovecraft, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Albert Payson Terhune, and the makers of a lot of old movies—Thanks."[32]

Narrator *Snuff* owes inspiration to Chum, Buff and other dogs in the stories of Albert Payson Terhune. His owner *Jack* is, of course, Jack the Ripper, who terrorized London in the autumn of 1888 by slaying women with a knife and mutilating their bodies afterward; in the dedication, Zelazny acknowledged Bloch's *The Night of the Ripper*. *Graymalk* is Graymalkin, familiar of the third witch in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Graymalk's mistress *Jill* is, therefore, that third witch; together with Jack, her name enables a pun that is not voiced until the end. *Nyarlathotep* and the *Elder Gods* come from H. P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos*. *Morris and MacCab* are based on William Burke and William Hare who, during the 1800s in Edinburgh, operated as serial killers and grave robbers (body snatchers) and sold the corpses to the medical school. *Larry Talbot* was the lycanthrope in the 1941 film *The Wolf Man*. *Rastov* is the crazy Russian monk Rasputin, who exerted undue influence over Tsar Nicholas II before and during World War I. *Owen* may stand for Owen Glendower of Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1*, who can call spirits from the vasty deep. The *Vicar* may be inspired by Lovecraft's "The Peace Advocate" and Barthélemy Lemeignan, vicar of Saint-Eustache, who sacrificed children in black masses. The vicar's *Raven* likely acknowledges the famous poem of Edgar Allan Poe. The *Count* is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The *Good Doctor* and *experiment man* come from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; the *small hunched companion* (Fritz or Igor) is a Hollywood addition. *Great Detective* and his *Companion* are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. The rest of the familiars have thematic names, such as *Bubo the rat*, whose name suggests the plague, carried by rats' fleas, producing markedly swollen lymph nodes (buboes) in humans. Chapter 22's Dreamworld sequence alludes extensively to H. P. Lovecraft's *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*.

A Night in the Lonesome October was a finalist for the Nebula Award in 1995, the first Zelazny novel since *Doorways in the Sand* to be so honored.

Donnerjack

In September 1991, Zelazny outlined the first novel of a new trilogy. He was disenchanted with cyberpunk but wanted to fully explore the potential of virtual reality. William Sanders explained, "In the last years of his life Roger Zelazny often spoke of the need to rescue the virtual reality concept from the rather scabby literary neighborhood it had come to inhabit. VR, he would say, was (at least potentially) the most wonderful of all human creations; it ought to be more than just a technological background for stories about alienated youth versus vicious megacorporations. I remember talking with him once about how no one had ever really come up to the standard of the very first VR story: Ray Bradbury's 'The Veldt,' published way back in the fifties in the old *Saturday Evening Post.*"[33]

Zelazny began the novel in 1992, writing to a fan, "I'm about to start work on a trilogy—*Donnerjack, The Gods of Virtù,* and *Virtù, Virtù,* as soon as I finish writing 'The Long Sleep' for *Wild Cards XIII.* One of these days I'll get *Deathmask* written…"[34] In the same letter he also identified *To Die in Italbar* as "my worst book."

Future Tales in the Amber Series

Prior to the release of *Prince of Chaos,* Zelazny hinted that he'd planted seeds of a future Amber tale in his novels. "I feel very much at home with the Amber universe and there are many more things that I can do. I had what I thought was a very neat idea of writing a history of Chaos, of doing a flashback to when Merlin was only 13 or 14 years old and living in the Courts of Chaos. Something that really wouldn't have much bearing on the story, but which might be a fun story in itself, and having a kid as a protagonist I would attempt to see it as a juvenile. I've only written one before [*A Dark Traveling*], and it's something I'd like to go back to. It wouldn't change the action but basically just add to the background. I came to see a point in the story where I suddenly saw something that had happened years ago, and I planted a couple of clues in case I ever did want to go back and write the book, and if I don't, it won't hurt anyone."[1] Elsewhere he intimated that the juvenile piece would include Merlin, Glait, Kergma, and the opal vase; in another piece he planned to explain the origin of Merlin's horse Tiger and Benedict's horse Glemdenning.[35] He also hinted that Corwin's sword was "something else" before it became a sword, and "the partial image of the Pattern upon the blade Grayswandir was placed there *by* the Pattern, for its own protection."[35]

Zelazny envisioned a series of linked Amber short stories to tie up some loose ends from the novels, planning to assemble those stories into a novel or a collection. He wrote five in total, including (in order), "The Salesman's Tale," "Blue Horse, Dancing Mountains," "The Shroudling and the Guisel," "Coming to a Cord," and "Hall of Mirrors." He never wrote the tale about Merlin and the opal vase or the story about the horses' origins. However, he did reveal the "something else" about Grayswandir in "The Salesman's Tale" and "Hall of Mirrors": Grayswandir and Brand's sword Werewindle were both originally spikards.

He wrote "The Salesman's Tale" for the anthology *Ten Tales* while visiting England, where he was guest of honor at Lunicon/Unicon 14 in Leeds from July 30 to August 1, 1993. In 1994 he said, "I don't have time to do another Amber novel for a while, but I do have a lot of loose ends I want to tie up from the earliest books, which people keep writing me letters about. I thought I would also characterize some of the people I didn't get to characterize fully and maybe even lay some groundwork for some stuff I want to do later. It will be a series of short stories—I'll do an Amber short story every now-and-then while I write other stuff, and hopefully some day I'll have enough to put together a new collection of tales of Amber, and then go on to write a couple more Amber novels."[17] "I'll eventually collect them into something like *Tales of Amber*, a collection of short stories which would serve as a kind of resting spot."[36] To an interviewer he added, "I know what's going to happen next, but I can't tell you. I'd have to kill you afterwards."[17]

Several years' intermittent exchanges between Zelazny and author Ed Greenwood (creator of *Forgotten Realms Dungeons & Dragons* campaign setting and novels) generated a unique Corwin and Fiona tale.[37,38] In 1977 Greenwood idly wrote six sentences of dialogue on a bookmark and placed it in his father's copy of *Nine Princes in Amber*. He met Zelazny at the Urcon 1 convention in Rochester in March 1979 and asked him to sign *Nine Princes*. Zelazny discovered the bookmark, read Greenwood's words, identified that Fiona and Corwin were speaking, and promptly wrote eight lines to continue the story. Delighted, Greenwood wrote the next section immediately after returning home—and in so doing, noticed that Zelazny had forgotten to sign the book! Seven years elapsed before they met again. Zelazny contributed a second section in June 1986 at the Ad Astra VI Convention in Toronto and a third section in May 1992 at Marcon 27 in Columbus, Ohio. Over time, Greenwood progressed from fan to author to Guest of Honor at conventions that Zelazny attended, and the bookmark acquired a second sheet of paper. "I planned to bring the 'bookmark collaboration' to GenCon in 1995...to pass it back and forth with Roger at a worldbuilding panel planned for that con (where we were both scheduled to be GoHs), but Roger died before the convention."[38] This fragment is the only known Amber fiction that Zelazny wrote collaboratively. Together with interstitial biography describing the exchanges with Zelazny, the story ultimately appeared in the last issue of *Amberzine* (March 2005).

Flare

The Mask of Loki was judged successful, so Zelazny and Thomas T. Thomas initiated their second novel, *Flare.* Editor and publisher Jim Baen again proposed a story in the *Wizard World* sequence, but they rejected that idea. Baen also required the senior author to provide an outline to the junior author, but Zelazny agreed to let Thomas write his own outline. *Flare* was hard science fiction. "I suggested we do a tribute to George Stewart, who wrote about natural disasters in *Storm* and *Earth Abides.* This novel would be set in the next couple of hundred years, when humans have spread throughout the solar system and deal with a massive solar flare. Roger and I actually got to talk together and shared some thoughts on structure and timing for a book whose main event passes through the system at just under light speed."[39]

Zelazny commented, critiqued, and suggested scientific articles that Thomas should read. A science editor double-checked the plausibility of the science. Zelazny was inspired to write the lengthy poem, "Ikhnaton's Hymn to the Sun," excerpts of which functioned as section breaks. "I felt it might be interesting to go way back to the early days (Egypt, 14th century, BC) and try a contemporary version of Ikhnaton's 'Hymn to the Sun'—that earliest expression of monotheism, appropriated some seven hundred years later when the need for Psalm CIV occurred [Psalm CIV in the Bible is based on the ancient Egyptian poem]… That done, we used excerpts from my rendition in *Flare*'s section breaks."[40]

Overall, Zelazny was less involved in this second collaboration. While hard science is not prominent in most other Zelazny novels, it is entirely in keeping with the Hugo and Nebula Award-winning "Home Is the Hangman" and other novellas from *My Name Is Legion.* Some readers have argued that the quark-like aliens in the sun and the alien tourists at the end of *Flare* must have been Zelazny's ideas. When asked, Thomas dimly remembered creating both himself but freely acknowledged that Zelazny could have suggested them early in their collaboration. "To me, they were that strange, separate, nonhuman dimension that makes a Zelazny book, like the demons and fire elementals in *Lord of Light.*"[39]

Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game

After many years' work, *Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game* finally came out in 1991. Although Wujcik created the bulk of the game, Zelazny provided input into character and setting in response to Wujcik's questions. The Zelazny Archives at Syracuse University contains their considerable correspondence. The book became especially popular in France upon release of a French translation, and this led to such spin-offs as an official set of Amber Trumps (Tarot d'Ambre).

Books Published:

Prince of Chaos
Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming

1992

Way Up High and *Here There Be Dragons*

It had taken a couple of decades, but in 1992 Donald M. Grant finally published these two children's books in a signed, slipcased limited edition, illustrated by Vaughn Bodé. They both (minus the illustrations) appear in this collection, and the afterwords detail the struggle to publish them. Paperback editions were planned but never appeared, possibly because Zelazny's death complicated matters.

Colterglass / Wilderness

After myriad exchanges between Zelazny and Gerald Hausman, their collaboration *Colterglass* neared completion. "I'm just about finished with a western historical novel that I've done in collaboration with Gerry Hausman, another fellow here in Santa Fe...it's something different that I've always wanted to try. He started telling me about his idea and got me interested in it, so we started working together. I'm very happy with it."[41]

Hausman recalled, "It took us one school year to complete the novel [after the first several chapters], and when it was done, we were really close friends, and the novel's completion was a little sad because our working methods had been so smooth and so well-integrated, and we'd had so much fun writing it together. Roger left the Colter chapters exactly as written except he asked if I wouldn't mind letting him write Colter Chapter 15: 'The hawk soared.' It's a one-line chapter, brilliant in its spare poetry. He also added the litany of Colter's final assets at the close of Chapter 19. Once again, he made it into a poem: a Whitmanic list of the things that Colter left behind him when he died. [This is the poem "Walking, of Course."] I love these two wonderful embellishments to the novel—Roger was an inventor, and he used poetry inventively with prose."[21]

They completed the novel in 1992 and sold it to Tor the following year, changing the title to *Wilderness* at the editor's request. Hausman's daughter Mariah Fox created pen and ink illustrations for the book.[42]

Clairvoyance or Telepathy?

Zelazny's fascination with myths and religions extended into mysticism and spiritualism. He believed that consciousness could escape and survive the physical body.[43] He told Carl Yoke that he could project astrally[43] and told his friend Gerald Hausman that "the spirit lives on before, during and after death, and it is no more confined to our definitions of existence than we are bound by our limitations in not being able to see it with our eyes."[44]

Several unusual incidents convinced Hausman. "Roger was clairvoyant. If you were thinking something, he felt it and sometimes commented on it."[45] On one occasion, Hausman was having a conversation with Trent Zelazny, who "asked me what my favorite movie was, and I had told him, without hesitation, *Black Orpheus*. No sooner had I said this than I looked up, and, about one hundred yards away, we both saw Roger's van pull into the parking lot…I said to Trent, 'One would probably think, even at this distance, that Roger could hear us talking.' Trent laughed, 'He probably can.' We walked to where Roger was, and he greeted us warmly. Then he whispered two words into my ear. '*Black Orpheus*,' he said, his face lit with a grin that quickly faded as he got [back] into the van."

Hausman felt this exemplified Zelazny's "mystical side. Not as a writer but perhaps as a telepath and as a person who saw many dimensions at the same time. He saw what I was doing months and even years before I did it."[46]

If at Faust You Don't Succeed and *A Farce to Be Reckoned With*

Zelazny and Sheckley finished their second collaboration in late 1991 or early 1992, but it did not go smoothly. The original plan for this trilogy placed Zelazny in the senior role, guiding Sheckley. For *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming*, Sheckley wrote a quick draft based on Zelazny's outline, and Zelazny wrote the final version. For *Faust* they took turns, writing sections and mailing the manuscript back and forth. Zelazny was shocked to discover that Sheckley was rewriting what he'd sent to him.[15] Zelazny's stated policy was not to rewrite a collaborator's words, and he called Sheckley to tell him to stop. But Sheckley continued to rewrite Zelazny, causing him to become increasingly disenchanted with the project. After *If at Faust You Don't Succeed* appeared, he told Carl Yoke that he would never collaborate on a novel again.[15]

The pair began the contracted third volume almost immediately, but Zelazny's dissatisfaction with Sheckley's rewrites affected its quality. It was panned for not being funny, for having annoying and tiresome characters, and for incoherent plotting. A letter from Sheckley to Zelazny reveals that only with the third book was Sheckley starting to consider it a trilogy with an inherent structure. "I didn't think about it so much as a trilogy as a book and a sequel and a final book before we get everybody tired of the characters. Now it looks as though there's an actual tripartite structure here that has been building. The second book was a lot heavier in terms of ideas than the first. I think maybe we ought to go this way. I think we're on to something now…"[47] The critical reaction indicated that everybody *was* tired of the characters before *A Farce to Be Reckoned With*; Zelazny was relieved to fulfill the contractual obligation.

Upon Zelazny's death in 1995, Sheckley said in a memorial essay that he'd only met Zelazny three times and displayed no hint that there had been problems between them. "Roger and I hit it off at once… I loved talking with Roger. He was quick, erudite, gentlemanly, and funny. He was a tremendous problem-solver. We had many interests in common. I always wished we had lived closer to each other, because I'm sure we would have spent a lot of time together."[48]

Foxes versus Hedgehogs

In a 1992 essay marking the thirtieth anniversary of his first professional sale, "Passion Play," Zelazny cited a quote from Greek poet Archilochus in *The Hedgehog and the Fox* by Isaiah Berlin, a study of Tolstoy's theory of history. Zelazny identified with that quote, for it rationalized his self-learning program. " 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.'—to the end of relating it to a division of thinkers into those two categories: the ones who relate everything to a single, central vision, and the ones who pursue many things—hedgehogs and foxes…for suddenly I knew myself to be a fox.

"As a fox, one chases after ideas for their own sake, not to buttress any hard core of belief. I saw that was the way my mind worked, and I realized it was one of the things I liked about science fiction—the play of ideas. And this fox-hedgehog notion has returned to me many times over the years. I have always gone about my reading—most of it non-fiction—in foxlike fashion, hunting after provocative ideas and insights. When some characters and an idea come together and I feel a story impulse present, I become a temporary hedgehog for the sake of that piece, searching after ways to make everything fit its single, central vision. When it's over I resume my foxlike prowling."[49]

Content in Santa Fe

Zelazny enjoyed life in Santa Fe, finding inspiration in its people, its wildlife, and especially its mountains. He described Santa Fe in the liner notes to Bruce Dunlap's music CD, *About Home*: "This is a place of amazing skies. It can be sunny in one direction, cloudy in another, with curtains of rain—*virgas*—waving in odd corners of the heavens; and double rainbows are common. All this over jagged horizons, bitten rough by mountains with names like Ortiz, Jemez, Sandia, Sangre de Cristo. Piñon pines and juniper trees cover the hills; chamisa [a rabbitbrush] flows golden among them. The nights are chilly, the days pleasant. Coyotes howl in season, driving dogs to distraction; jackrabbits play suicide games with passing pickup trucks; ravens circle the roadkill. And the wind is often with us.

"But home is also a state of mind. Here it is colored by Spanish and Indian culture as well as the raw beauty of the land. One hears odd words and phrases not common elsewhere, sees a lot of silver, turquoise, leather, eats interestingly spiced foods. There is a different rhythm to the days, the seasons."[50]

Books Published:

Way Up High
Here There Be Dragons
Flare
Gone to Earth: Author's Choice Monthly #27

1993

Comics

Zelazny grew up reading comics and enjoyed them as an adult. He collected John Ostrander's *Grimjack* and Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* and *The Books of Magic* and others. In his introduction to *Demon Knight,* a graphic novel about Grimjack, Zelazny said that the main character's changing nature appealed to him. "I was instantly attracted by the cover of *Grimjack #1* (August 1984) which depicted a long-haired, golden-earringed individual with a magnificently scarred face...[John Gaunt] had a tantalizingly complex past...and a future. He has been changed considerably by events. In this sense, the entire series over these past five years has been more in the nature of a novel, each issue a chapter thereto, than a typical, episodic comic book [with unchanging, flat characters]."[51]

In his introduction to *The Books of Magic*, Zelazny described Neil Gaiman as "a medium specialist. While his tales are gripping, moving, there is in particular the way of his stories to consider. I'm always fascinated by the point of attack, and by the angles in which he views people, situations, settings, actions. It's his approach that I study as much as the ideas that he employs."[52]

Zelazny's childhood love of comics antedated his first encounters with mythology and science fiction. "I remember reading newspaper comic strips & editorial cartoons as soon as I began to read. Then comic books along w/regular reading. I never stopped enjoying comics. I'm a fan of comic art & I enjoy good commercial art."[53] His favorite comics were Disney's *Uncle Scrooge* and *Donald Duck*, and he collected these two as books and newspapers clippings. He also amassed *Doc Savage* comics and novels; consequently his son Devin became fascinated with that character.[54]

Zelazny enjoyed seeing some of his own stories adapted into comic books or graphic novels, including those assembled for *The Illustrated Roger Zelazny. A Night in the Lonesome October* was illustrated comic-book style with Gahan Wilson's one-panel images. Jack of Shadows rematerialized for a new graphic novel, *Shadowland*, but the project was not completed (the outline for it appears in this collection). DC Comics rendered the first two Amber novels into graphic novels in 1996—and for several years his son Trent worked on adapting the entire Amber decalogy for a new graphic series to be published by Dabel Brothers.[7] In January 2008 Trent Zelazny described "amazing" artwork by Caanan White and said that the novels were in production for expected release that year.[7] However, there have been no further announcements about the project from Dabel Brothers or any other publisher. The Amber series inspired a lot of graphic-style fan art as well.

Zelazny's contributions to the comics field earned him an Inkpot Award for best prose writer from Comic-Con International in 1993, where he was a Guest of Honor.

More Thoughts about Writing

Zelazny offered a unique perspective on short story writing to his colleagues.[55,56] Neil Gaiman recalled, "My friend Steve Brust sat me down in a bar with Roger, and the three of us spoke about story structure for most of the evening. When Roger spoke, Steve and I listened. 'Many of my better stories,' said Roger, pulling on his pipe, explaining how to write short stories, 'are just the last chapters of novels I did not write.' "[56]

This perspective determined when to start a story. "Had I wanted, my stories 'Permafrost' and '24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai' could've been novels. There was easily enough material there. I chose instead to start near their endings, explaining what had gone before as economically as possible while moving right into the 'good parts.' It was an esthetic judgment both times. And both are stronger as short stories than they would have been as novels.

"It has been my experience that if I have what I feel to be a very good idea but do not like the mechanical things that seem necessary for its expression, then I should reconsider the structure of the piece.

This usually results in my finding a different point in time for the action to commence."[57]

He counseled the novice, "Persistence. You do all the things you learn to do in the way of the craft, you hope for inspiration in the way of something perhaps more involved, but it's not enough even to sit down and write a good book or a good story. You've got to keep doing it over and over.

"Don't discourage easily, because more likely than not, for the first few years, everything will come back and it'll be rejected—even if it's quite good—because I think editors are more conservative these days.

"If your career does start catching on, in my experience, from people I've talked to, all that old stuff you got rejected can quite often be taken out again and sold. It's not that it's changed any in quality by aging, like wine in a cask; it's that you've suddenly become more commercially viable. They say 'oh, we need something by this person. It's not a bad story.' And it might be the same person who'd rejected it earlier. I've seen that happen too."[36]

Wilderness

Tor/Forge accepted *Wilderness* in February 1993. Zelazny's first non-genre novel published, it appeared the following year. He'd written *The Dead Man's Brother* more than twenty years earlier, but it didn't appear until 2009. Curiously, John Clute described *Wilderness* as "semi-autobiographical" in his *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*.[58] It may be considered a semi-*biographical* account of its two main characters, but it is not an autobiography by either author.

Zelazny and Hausman did some signing events together. Hausman recalled an incident in Albuquerque: "a woman with a big Stetson who asked us to sign her book. She was a little annoyed that we did not recognize her. Finally, she removed her hat and said—'Can't you tell who I am?' Roger and I apologized, and both of us said no. The woman laughed. 'I thought you could tell by the way my ears stick out. It's a family resemblance. I am John Colter's great-great-great niece!' Later, she told us that we'd gotten everything right in the novel, and she said it was about time someone told the story straight from the heart. A similar thing happened here in Florida at a party: I met a direct descendant of Hugh Glass."[21]

Reviewers found the book gripping and compelling. Hausman was amused to note that "Charles Kurault included the *Colterglass* tale in his book *America* as if it were fact. I had a laugh at that—did we make our historical fiction so unfictive that it seemed like biographical fact?"[21] The novel did sufficiently well that the editor requested another collaboration. Zelazny said, "The editor, a fellow named Bob Gleason, is quite an authority on western fiction. He mentioned to us recently that he'd like another. I decided whether we do it or not, I would like to at least study the historical background. I've been a history buff for many years. A second book by us would be a few years down the line…"[22] Hausman confirmed, "Roger and I talked about collaboration, but the closest we got was the outline he wrote for an unusual guidebook of New Mexico called *Cities of Gold*. He wanted me to do it with him, and we certainly would've, but unfortunately, our time together ran out."[21]

Although Zelazny died before any work began, he did provide Hausman with an idea. Zelazny dreamed that Hausman wrote a novel about "Jamaica, a buried treasure and a wraith named James Bond," and he told Hausman.[46] "Shortly before he died, he had a lucid dream about a novel I was to write about my mystical experiences in Jamaica. He phoned me and gave me the outline for that novel, and, coincidentally, I am writing it now. It will be called *Sungazer* and it is, as you might imagine, science fiction."[21]

The Prose Poet

Zelazny mused on a poetic presence in his prose, seemingly missing in newer authors' work: "the difference is how English is taught now than when I was in school. Nowadays, they don't memorize sonnets, long sections of poetry. At the time, I thought it a dull exercise; later, I found poems that I liked memorized themselves. Then the lines, the rhythms for some of the poems I'd taken the trouble to memorize, play in the mind when writing prose, slip into its form."[59] Like Ray Bradbury, another author also described as a "prose poet," Zelazny continued to write and publish poetry in addition to his fiction.

Roger Zelazny by Jane Lindskold

In 1990 the publisher Twayne commissioned Jane Lindskold to write a book about Zelazny for its *Twayne's Authors Series* of literary criticism. Part biography and part literary critique, her book *Roger*

Zelazny appeared in late 1993. It received mixed reviews, but it fared better than Theodore Krulik's similarly titled book.[60–62] The book begins with the statement that Lindskold met Zelazny as a fan and befriended him from 1990–1992 while researching the book.[63] More recently, she admitted that they became lovers during that interval.[64] She and Zelazny moved in together shortly after the book was published. In retrospect, Lindskold may not have retained the objectivity needed for a literary critique of a major author. Her book remains important for its interviews, correspondence from Zelazny, and her insight into his writing and personal life.

Distinctions:

Inkpot Award (Comic-Con International) for best prose writer
Locus Poll novelette #7:
"Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love"

Books Published:

A Night in the Lonesome October
If at Faust You Don't Succeed

——————1994——————

Life Adjustments

Zelazny's friendship with Jane Lindskold had deepened into romance. By late 1993 he was ready to leave Judy, to whom he had been married since 1966.[65,66] He told Carl Yoke that his marriage had failed several years before he met Lindskold.[15] His son Trent said, "I won't go into details, but yes, there were problems. The last couple of years as a family, it was five people living in five separate locked rooms."[7] Lindskold's own marriage was over, and in late 1993, "when I told Roger I was getting a divorce, he asked me if I would come and live with him in Santa Fe."[66]

The two were in very good spirits, planning their new home. Zelazny decided that this was a good time to have a full medical check-up. He'd been experiencing low energy for some months, a complaint that can indicate something serious. The news was not good: he had cancer of the large bowel (colorectal cancer), and it was inoperable. Chemotherapy was the only option. The diagnosis caused Zelazny and Lindskold to delay their plans for a few months, and he offered to release her from her promise to move in with him (she refused).[66] Lindskold wrote, "In early 1994, while contemplating separating from Judy and moving in with fellow writer Jane Lindskold, Zelazny discovered that he had cancer. He went into treatment almost immediately, and his condition temporarily improved. In mid-1994, he and Lindskold set up housekeeping in Santa Fe, in order to remain close to his mother and children."[65]

After twenty-eight years of marriage and three children, Zelazny separated from Judy but never divorced her. He moved in with Jane Lindskold in June 1994 and remained with her for the last year of his life.

The chemotherapy in early 1994 was excruciating. His friend Gerald Hausman helped him, using cures for ailments and nausea that he'd gathered during summers in Jamaica. "I used to make Irish Moss, the only thing he would eat for a while. It's a Jamaican substance, a sea moss, boiled with linseed. He couldn't eat and was often dizzy, and I found homeopathic remedies for him."[67] The chemotherapy also rendered Zelazny unable to write, but he kept up with his reading program. "When I've gone for long stretches of time, like when I was sick a while back, I felt very uncomfortable. I read a lot, but I can only read so much before I want to start putting words down myself."[14] Once that interval passed and his muse returned, he resumed writing energetically.

He and Lindskold shared a crammed, book-lined office where they worked on their writing projects, bounced ideas about, and read rough drafts to each other.[66] Lindskold discovered that Zelazny laughed aloud at the jokes he wrote and rehearsed other lines *sotto voce.*[14] Devin, Trent, and Shannon Zelazny were frequently in the home, "bringing their triumphs, problems and concerns."[68] Zelazny had a reputation for knowing just about everything, and even his children's schoolmates asked him to explain things that the teachers could not.

The goal was long term survival if not a cure, and by most accounts Zelazny spent his last year in very good spirits, energetic, full of life, writing and editing. Trent Zelazny, Walter Jon Williams, Jane Lindskold, George R. R. Martin, and others who knew him observed how happy he was in that last year.[69–71] As Trent put it, "The last year or so of his life, I never saw my father happier. I never saw him more outgoing in the 18 years I was fortunate enough to know him."[7] Jack Dann recalled that by March 1994, "Roger had finally aged. Seeing him was a shock. It was as if he had just decided to look old. He was, of course, ill; but he certainly didn't act it."[72] Indeed, Zelazny expected to beat the cancer and behaved as if that were the case. He often had a blood transfusion before major public appearances, boosting his energy and making him look healthier than he actually was.[73] Consequently, when he died, it was quite unexpected for many of his friends, who'd had no idea that he had cancer, not even suspecting that anything was wrong with his health.[74]

Jane Lindskold wrote, "Despite his illness, during the last year of his life Zelazny's enthusiasm for writing was, if anything, more intense than it had been in the previous decade. He completed several short stories, edited two anthologies, contributed to a computer game, and worked on two novels, *Donnerjack* and *Lord Demon*."[65]

Biographer Krulik said, "by August 1994 Roger knew that he was dying of cancer. In the face of that, he threw himself into his writing, working to complete projects he had begun. Among these was a series of Amber short stories."[75] Krulik's remarks suggest a desperate man and contradict the description provided by Zelazny's son, friends, and colleagues. But Zelazny didn't write "a series of Amber short stories" during his final year: four of the five were written before the cancer diagnosis.

Carl Yoke concluded, "I'm certain that even with Roger's cancer, he never anticipated that he would die. There was still that youthful aura of invulnerability about him."[76]

Role-Playing Games

Despite hints of familiarity with role-playing games in the latter five Amber novels, the *Wild Cards* series, and the *Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game*, Zelazny was not a gamer. Eric Wujcik introduced him to gaming in 1993; Jane Lindskold's essay "Zelazny and the Zelaforms" recounts that first experience.[77] After Lindskold and Zelazny moved in together, she encouraged his interest in the games, and he came to enjoy them very much. George R. R. Martin, Melinda Snodgrass, and Walter Jon Williams numbered among their regular gaming companions. There are several accounts of the characters he created, including foul-mouthed wildcat oil man Oklahoma Crude, crazed ex-Vietnam veteran New York detective Drum, the Chinese poet warrior Li Piao, and Sky, a ship's chaplain who recited "The

Agnostic's Prayer" from *Creatures of Light and Darkness* and believed himself capable of ministering to any sentient being—human, alien, or rock[78,79] Some of the characters derived from stories that he was writing—detective Dale Drum appeared in the *Donnerjack* trilogy's original outline (in the novel, he was *Desmond* Drum), and a character named Li Piao figured in *Lord Demon.*

Psychoshop

Zelazny was approached in 1993 about completing a novel—*The Psycho Hockshop*—that Alfred Bester left unfinished. Archived correspondence at Syracuse University indicates that he read the fragment, became enthusiastic, and against his better judgment, started working on it. He sheepishly admitted completing a substantial amount even before he had a contract. He finished *Psychoshop* in 1994; the editor requested revisions, and he completed those by early 1995. In an Easter 1995 interview at the Conquest convention in Melbourne, Australia, he said, "The most recent [collaboration] that I've just finished is the novel Alfred Bester was working on when he died. I'm a great admirer of Alfred Bester's, and I thought, 'Well, I can be off writing something else for more money, but I'll never have another opportunity to finish a book by Alfred Bester.' It's called *Psychoshop*, about a shop in Rome where you can actually pawn parts of your psyche that you're unhappy with or want to replace. It has a very unusual proprietor. I couldn't resist that.

"Bester had written ninety-two pages [of manuscript], and that was it. There were also about four pages missing from the ninety-two. What I did was treat the missing pages as a black box experiment. Something went in there, and something came out here, and I just had to figure out what I needed to make it happen that way. I picked up the story where Bester had stopped mid-sentence, same thing I did with Phil Dick. I picked up Phil's in mid-sentence, and I completed that sentence and went on writing. I did the same thing with Bester. I hope that bodes well."[14]

Editor John Betancourt considered Zelazny most suitable to complete Bester's work. Zelazny understood the connection. "Bester liked eccentric characters too. He liked to get them into certain wacky situations, but he was also kind of earthy. He also had a sort of sardonic sense of humor, ultimately. And he was noted for plots that did strange twists. Someone noticed that I like that sort of procedure too."[36]

Zelazny was both excited and anxious. Jack Dann said, "He was worried that he couldn't do the flash and pyrotechnics the way Alfie could. Bester was a major influence on Roger, and Roger was nervous as a colt about having collaborated with the master."[72] At Zelazny's request, Dann read and critiqued the manuscript. "I gave Roger feedback on some minor quibbles, and told him that I loved the book, that he had out-Bestered Bester. Roger seemed very pleased."[72]

Because *Psychoshop* did not appear until several years after Zelazny's death, rumors spread that Greg Bear, who wrote an introduction to the book, had completed final revisions. However, Bear confirmed that he did not revise, and as far as he knew, the last author to touch the manuscript was Zelazny himself.[80] Jane Lindskold also confirms that she did not write or edit it.[81] Moreover, Zelazny's handwritten draft confirms that the unusual text (spiral poem, recumbent figure, starburst) were all his work and not Bester's, as many have assumed.[82] Zelazny's death simply led to delays in getting the manuscript to press.

A computer printout of Bester's ninety-two-page manuscript—missing four pages and ending mid-sentence—resides in the archives at Syracuse University. Both Bester's manuscript and Zelazny's handwritten one verify that Zelazny wrote several pages to replace Bester's missing pages, and he picked up the main writing from the very last part of chapter three.[82] From the start of chapter four, the writing is entirely Zelazny's. *Psychoshop*'s final manuscript reveals a noticeable change in typeface at the start of chapter four and the surprising discovery of a final chapter that Editor Betancourt deleted. Chapter ten consists of a poem by Zelazny, "Our Own Piece of the Sky,"[83] contained in this collection. To retain Zelazny's intention, the poem should be restored in future editions of the novel. The first edition also dropped the following seven paragraphs immediately after the reclining figure on page 74:

> Back in her bed I drew my knees up to my chest and clasped them with my arms.
>
> I rested my head on them, looking away from her at the wall where all her cast lives hung.
>
> I began to shiver.
>
> I felt her hand on my shoulder.
>
> It moved to the back of my neck then down to the shoulder again.
>
> And again.
>
> And again.[82,83]

More Thoughts about Writing

Asked about his tendency to create extremely powerful characters who seemed to have no idea what was going on, Zelazny replied, "Well, if you're going to make someone that strong, you have to put one of their feet in a bucket, or there's no real story."[17]

What advice would he give new writers? "The competition has gotten stiffer, but the same advice as always applies, only maybe doubled: it's persistence and a certain toughness of spirit. You've got to be able to take a beating. There was a terrific heavy-weight bout in 1956 or 1957, when Rocky Marciano successfully defended his title. In the photos of him afterward, he was all bleeding and bruised, but he won. And there was an editorial about it in some sports magazine that said, 'Sometimes the mark of a champion is not how well you can do a certain thing, but whether you have the ability to take a greater beating than the other guy and still remain standing.' Be assured that no matter how hard Rocky pounded that other guy, he probably took more of a beating himself, but he had more stamina. I think it's the sort of staying-power that allows you to get your emotional butt kicked quite often from all the rejections you get. Other people are out there doing it too. If they're more sensitive than you and they stop first, you're still in the running. The one who is tougher, who is persistent, who keeps writing, makes it."[17]

He also counseled young writers to focus on their weak points and to improve them. "I thought it was wrong for a writer to find his or her strongest point and capitalize on that completely. That is, if you are extremely good at writing dialogue, and you do a story which just scintillates with brilliant dialogue, and they buy it and ask you to write another one, and you make your career of writing stories with clever dialogue, eventually you're hurting yourself because you're getting hypertrophied. You are capitalizing on your virtues without attempting to develop your weaknesses up to a point of at least competence… When you are finally in the position as a professional selling things regularly, you should take the chance of writing from weakness whenever you can."[29]

What prompted his distinctively styled word choices? "Well, I like words, the way words play with each other, talk together. Partly it comes from a liking of poetry. Partly, I suppose it goes back to an early liking for word games and crossword puzzles and all sorts of things like that."[36] When he was six, he watched a retired schoolteacher do a crossword puzzle at a party, and he'd immediately become hooked on them. "She showed me how the thing worked. The next day, I worked on the crossword puzzle in the paper, and I did that every day for ages until I got so I could do crossword puzzles at a very early age."[36] This undoubtedly increased his vocabulary and enabled him to use precise, sometimes unusual words.

He wrote on a legal pad while traveling to upwards of ten conventions per year. Returning home, he would type the final copy from the legal pad, where he'd already made corrections.

An Encyclopedic Memory

His extended program now involved reading up to 19 books simultaneously on such topics as economic theory, oceanography, and even foreign language. "There's something to be said for that approach apart from the fact that you're just acquiring information in different areas. I learned—which is one of the reasons I continue it—that there's a kind of interesting effect in reading in lots of different areas at the same time. There's a kind of cross-fertilization sometimes of ideas."[36] His colleagues were accustomed to his impressive knowledge but did not mistake it for vanity. George R. R. Martin recalled, "Sometimes it seemed he had read every book ever printed. He knew something about everything and everything about some things, but he never used his knowledge to impress or intimidate. In an age when everyone is a specialist, Zelazny was the last Renaissance Man, fascinated by the world and all that's in it, capable of talking about Doc Savage and Proust with equal expertise and enthusiasm."[70] Michael Stackpole said, "he was just that way: brilliant without need to or intention of showing off and helpful, always helpful."[84]

However briefly met, Zelazny displayed genuine interest in what a colleague or fan said, and he demonstrated uncanny recall afterwards. Graduate student and writer Peter Quinones attended the 1980 Westercon in Los Angeles where Zelazny was Guest of Honor. They met during the Ice Cream Social that kicked off the convention. Quinones planned to write a Master's thesis on Zelazny's works, "and he was honored and helpful when I told him of my project." Quinones left graduate school the following year and never finished the thesis. But several years after that brief meeting, "when I ran into him at an Octocon, he looked at me, and said, 'Rocky Road and Strawberry. Whatever became of the thesis?' Which totally floored me that he would remember the ice cream I was eating at the time."[85]

Zelazny's humor ranged from dry to grotesque, with a particular fondness for puns and wordplay. "I think Will Durant said somewhere in his *History of Civilization* series that he sometimes thought that one of the great legacies of human thought down the ages was the world's humor. I'm misquoting him, but that's the essence of it. I mean, if you just look at the dark side of life, it's a very distorted picture. Of course, if you just look at the light side of it, it is too. You need them both for balance.

"I think a writer who wants to do justice to the human condition has to look at it both ways. Was it Lord Byron who said that life is a tragedy to the person who feels and a comedy to the person who thinks? But you have to do both—think and feel."[36]

Zelazny's work reflected many influences. "I think it partly comes from poetry, which is where striking metaphor is often common coin. It partly comes from humor, where the essence of it is some kind of twist or distortion to something, and it also comes from the fact that I read mythology most of my life. And I do these things—the twisting and shifting of imagery—with things I know well, such as mythology. It all kind of flows together. I just automatically run the things I've created through the machinery in my mind."[36]

Books Published:

Wilderness
And the Darkness Is Harsh

——————1995——————

Origins of Amber; Amber Comic Books

DC Comics optioned the Amber series for graphic novel adaptation, but the first issue did not appear until 1996. Zelazny's death put the project in limbo, and DC Comics adapted only the first two books (*Nine Princes in Amber* and *The Guns of Avalon*); each became three separate comic books.

In the introduction to Book 1 of *Nine Princes in Amber,* Zelazny discussed the origin of the Trumps and other aspects of the series:

"For several years I'd been fascinated by the art of playing cards. I began collecting them—odd decks, old decks, Tarots. I found them in junk shops, antique shops, hobby shops. I read books on them. What they were all doing in that special place in my mind is hard to say. But when the time came and Corwin searched Flora's study, looking for anything that might give him a clue concerning his past, they were there, waiting for just that moment, and they had to be the right thing. And when Flora mentioned Amber, I saw it, I suddenly knew what it was, what it had to be.

"Yes, I started the story without knowing everything in it. I did this because I could feel that the story was all there, somewhere, just waiting for the proper chords to be struck to bring it forth. I do not think that it is bits and pieces that turn themselves into a story. Rather, I feel that the story finds the bits and pieces it needs to tell itself...*Nine Princes in Amber* almost wrote itself. I just wrote it down, with all the pleasure of someone reading for enjoyment, discovering what was happening as I went along...[86]

Zelazny's card collection numbered over a hundred decks from playing cards to Tarot cards, most collected for their variety and illustrations rather than any perceived value. His collection also included Amber Tarots that fans created and sent to him.

Critics Again

"Some reviewers will talk as though the only things I've ever written were the Amber books and a handful of good short stories. They forget there are 40 other books out there, some of which are worth noting. But one always gets referred to as the author of the Amber series, then they name certain stories that received awards and forget things like *Eye of Cat, Lord of Light, Doorways in the Sand,* and *Creatures of Light and Darkness.*"[36]

In what may have been his last recorded interview, in 1995 Zelazny discussed critics. "A number of reviewers would say things like, 'Roger Zelazny's a pretty good writer, but all he writes is these darned rehashes of old myths. It would be nice to see what else he could do sometime.' Then after I'd finally learned all this stuff I'd spent several years catching up on [through his reading program] and started writing stories that involved science, I started getting these reviews that said 'Gee, Zelazny used to write these wonderful stories involving mythology.' And I said to hell with it and decided to ignore reviewers."[14]

Had he ever learned anything from critics? "Not really. I got comments from critics that I really didn't like and so I worked out ways of working in more of those things they really didn't like in my next story." On the other hand, criticism from editors and other writers could be valuable. "That's different! These people are pros. They are not out to destroy your aesthetic and refashion you in their own image. Editors are just out to make as strong a book as they can. I've learned some very nice things from editors. I've learned some dumb things, too… Every now and then you just pick tricks up from editors… I think criticism from authors and editors is important if it's good. And after a while you get to know which ones have some common sense."[14]

"Godson"

A favorite creation from his last two years, "Godson" was a retelling and expansion—with the Zelazny touch—of the fable "Godfather Death." Zelazny also adapted the story into a humorous musical, writing the lyrics for several songs as well as the dialogue. He had preliminary discussions with local musician Bruce Dunlap about doing the score, and he'd performed it solo (chanting the songs) at a party held by George R. R. Martin just a few months before his death.[70,71] With Zelazny's death the project also died, and the music was never written.[87] The script and lyrics appear in this volume.*

Anthologies

Zelazny was a judge of the *L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future* contest and regularly received stacks of manuscripts to review (many of these are in the Syracuse University archives). His involvement in this project led to speculation that he was interested in Scientology and Dianetics, but he wasn't. Friend and colleague Algis Budrys (who coordinated *Writers of the Future*) asked him to participate, and he enjoyed working with up-and-coming writers.

As well as contributing to many original anthologies, Zelazny participated in a popular shared world anthology (the *Wild Cards* series), created his own shared world series (*Alien Speedway*), supervised contributions to his Amber series (*Visual Guide to Castle Amber, Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game, The Amber Sourcebook,* the two choose-your-adventure books, the *Nine Princes in Amber* computer game, and the Amber board game that was never released), and guided author Tom Thomas in the composition of two novels (*Flare* and *The Mask of Loki*). These experiences prompted him to edit anthologies, something he had not done since *Nebula Award Stories Three.*

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* *Godson* with original music by David G. Grubbs, Jerry Sabatini, and Debra LeBrun was performed at Boskone in 2010 and reprised at Renovation, the 2011 Worldcon.

He worked on four original anthologies in the last two years of his life. In order of publication, these included:

Warriors of Blood and Dream contained tales involving martial arts that he solicited from writers in 1993. His introduction described his fascination with the techniques and gave a moving portrayal of his friend and teacher who had succumbed to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Zelazny requested stories from 15 authors, including Joe R. Lansdale, Richard Lupoff, Steven Barnes, Michael Stackpole, and Jane Lindskold. Zelazny wrote an introduction to each story but did not contribute one of his own. *Warriors* was published the month he died.

Wheel of Fortune gathered tales of gambling and other games of chance. Zelazny contributed an introduction, an original Amber short story, "Blue Horse, Dancing Mountains," and an introduction to each story. Also begun in 1993, the book was in press when he died and published in December 1995.

Forever After was a concept novel about what happens after "Happily Ever After" in fairy tales or fantasy novels. Good trumps evil, but all talismans, weapons, and persons persist in one place. If that power isn't dispersed, will it cause problems? He recruited four authors to write the four principal tales, and he wrote the frame story in five sections. It was published posthumously in December 1995 with an afterword by a contributor, David Drake. The frame story appears in this collection under the title "Forever After: Preludes and Postlude."

The Williamson Effect gathered original stories that honored Jack Williamson. Zelazny had assembled the stories but had not written the introduction, notes, or a story of his own when he died. David Brin wrote the introduction, and James Frenkel contributed notes for each story. This anthology was published in May 1996.

Donnerjack

Zelazny was actively working on *Donnerjack* in the months before he died. "The one I'm writing now is set in the 22nd Century and is a non-cyberpunk world datanet story. Which is very different from anything I've seen so far."[14] Scattered sections of the novel's first half are identical to portions of the hand-written manuscript residing in the Zelazny Archives at Syracuse University.

Chronomaster

During his last two years Zelazny and Jane Lindskold worked on the concept for an sf computer game, *Chronomaster*. As noted in the afterword to "Sandow's Shadow," *Chronomaster* evolved from a Francis Sandow story that Zelazny had outlined and abandoned.[88,89] Although Zelazny's name is more prominent on the box and related materials, Lindskold wrote the script and dialogue for the game.[89] She also wrote one novel based on the game, noting that "much of the novel *Chronomaster* is wholly mine. Roger died while that work was in progress."[89] A planned trilogy never appeared, just this book.

On Politics

Readers scoured Zelazny's stories for hints about his religious beliefs. Similarly, they searched in vain for clues to his politics. "People have told me that they can't tell my politics from my stories. The reason is something that probably smacks of perversity, save that I was the way that I am long before I'd thought it through: When the country's political climate is conservative, I tend to grow liberal. When it swings the other way, I find myself feeling more conservative. More likely, it shows me as being basically mistrustful of both government and the temper of the times in general. I am aware of a somewhat paranoid element in my makeup when it comes to anyone or anything capable of exercising power over me."[90]

In a 1972 interview he elaborated: "I have no objection to the expression of political opinions in SF if they are an integral part of the story structure. I don't at all appreciate their intrusion for the purpose of converting a story into a political tract, because I consider that intellectually insulting."[91] He also noted "Yes, I feel that political ideas are fair game in a science fiction story and, yes again, I feel that more of them are appearing these days. Hearkening back to an oldie, I thought *Starship Troopers* a powerful story; and in the future, when I read a story containing political ideas, my judgments will still be aesthetic rather than moral ones."[92]

Final Thoughts on Writing

At a convention a few months before he died, Zelazny described his writing habits, which, except for a growing interest in computers, hadn't changed much in thirty years. He sometimes used a desktop Macintosh for correspondence and for access to an early Zelazny newsgroup (transcripts reside in the archives), but not for writing stories. "I normally compose on a lap-held portable typewriter and I have a lady [Nancy Applegate] who does part-time clerical work for me. I give her the manuscript and have her run it through her computer and get her to give me disks if the publisher wants disks, or hard copy if they want hard copy. She's afraid I'm going to learn word processing and put her out of a job. And I'm afraid I am… Another year or two at most and I'll switch over."[14] He dedicated *A Farce to Be Reckoned With* to Nancy Applegate "in thanks for blood, sweat and tears."[93]

His methodical writing habits forestalled writer's block. "I try to write every day. I used to try to write four times a day, minimum of three sentences each time. It doesn't sound like much but it's kinda like the hare and the tortoise. If you try that several times a day you're going to do more than three sentences, one of them is going to catch on. You're going to say 'Oh boy!' and then you just write. You fill up the page and the next page. But you have a certain minimum so that at the end of the day, you can say 'Hey I wrote four times today, three sentences, a dozen sentences.' Each sentence is maybe twenty words long. That's 240 words which is a page of copy, so at least I didn't goof off completely today. I got a page for my efforts, and tomorrow it might be easier because I've moved as far as I have."[14]

He still felt compelled to write. "Yeah. I do. Not just for the mercenary end of things [writing to pay the bills] although that is a consideration; no, there's something inside."[14] He'd never been blocked, but, "I've slowed down. I can always write and that's the thing with three sentences at a time, even if you're feeling sluggish you can always get three sentences out. I've never had one of those really bad ones like some writers I've known. But there are times when you'll be writing along and you're not exactly sure what you want to do next. What I do is just slow down and think about it and it's usually not long before you are back on track."[14]

He preferred to write short stories. "From an aesthetics standpoint you really have to pare down to the bone. You can't write a throwaway scene. Whereas in a novel—see in my first book I could have Conrad walking along a street late at night trying to figure out what he's going to do about some problem. And have him stop in a café and have him listen to a singer for about a page and then walk on… I prefer short stories for technical virtuosity, very compressed, very economical. How to say everything in as brief a span as possible."[14]

Receiving fewer awards in his last years did not bother him. "I don't really think I have anything to prove anymore. I know that I know how to write, and I know how to write fairly well, and I still come up with an original idea every now and then. The readers seem to like them too because the books do pretty well. I don't lust after any more awards."[36]

In convention appearances during that last year, Zelazny surprised audiences by calling himself a hack writer.[89,94] "I sometimes enjoy thinking of myself as a 'hack'—well, a 'professional'—able to write to order in a hurry when the need arises."[94] Jane Lindskold explained, "Although frequently praised for the artistry of his prose, Roger was equally proud of being a working writer who could write an essay on a tight deadline or a short story to meet the request of an editor. Not for him the pensive musing, the artistic pose, the fits, tempers, and blocks that so many writers affect. His breadth of enthusiasms meant that frequently he had many irons in the fire, and he was not unknown for delivering a novel past deadline. However, when he turned the novels in, they required so little polishing and editing that the editors patiently learned to accept the delay."[68]

Final Favorite Novels of His Career

February 1994[17] and Easter 1995[14] interviews asked Zelazny to name his favorite published works. "*Lord of Light, This Immortal, Doorways in the Sand, Eye of Cat,* and this recent one, *A Night in the Lonesome October*, are my five favorite books. They have very little in common with each other, and I liked them for different reasons."[17] He omitted *Nine Princes in Amber*, *Isle of the Dead*, and *Jack of Shadows,* perennial fan favorites. Certainly *Nine Princes in Amber* and its nine sequels and other spin-offs provided the financial security that he enjoyed as a full-time writer. He didn't name *Creatures of Light and Darkness,* but it was his favorite experimental novel. He mentioned no collaborative novels, but *Coils*, *The Mask of Loki*, *Wilderness* and *Deus Irae* represent the best of them.

He rarely named his *least* favorite books, but an interviewer pushed him on this point in 1976. "Let me put it this way: The books that I'd put at the other end of the list are not necessarily things that I consider bad. It's hard to say you *hate* a particular book or anything like that; I *don't* actively dislike any of my books. But I tend to be suspicious of anything that I write too easily. Maybe it's a carry-over of the old work ethic or something. But the books that I did the fastest jobs on are the ones that are lower on my list. *Damnation Alley* was written quite quickly...actually, so was *Nine Princes in Amber*. For a long time I didn't have a really high opinion of that book, just because I wrote it that quickly... *To Die in Italbar* was another quickly-written book. I'm still not sure whether I played fair with my intentions at all in that book. I don't know that drumming in Sandow as a *deus ex machina* was the best thing to do. I still sort of think that if I had it to do over again I would've continued and worked out a disease mechanism. It's better than a goddess. [*Laughter*]"[95]

Death

Roger Joseph Zelazny died on June 14, 1995, at age 58 of kidney failure and complications of colorectal cancer. Walter Jon Williams noted that Zelazny had appeared confused during a gaming session just days before.[79] He had been in remission for a year after chemotherapy, and close friends noted that he seemed thinner but otherwise well. Two days after the gaming session, he collapsed and was taken to the hospital. He died the next day. His children—Devin, Trent, and Shannon—were with him for much of his last day, and both Jane Lindskold and Trent were at the bedside when he passed. His body was cremated, and his ashes were scattered across the Sangre de Cristo Mountains outside of Santa Fe. It was a fitting location. He'd often described his view of the range from his office window to friends, and the mountains inspired works, ranging from "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai" to Mt. Kolvir of *The Chronicles of Amber*. Fred and Joan Saberhagen hosted a memorial at their home, and attendees included George R. R. Martin, Neil Gaiman, Walter Jon Williams, Steven Brust, Jane Lindskold, Trent Zelazny, and other authors whom Zelazny had influenced as author, friend, or both.

The science fiction community's response was swift and shocked. George R. R. Martin said, "He was a poet, first, last, always. His words sang. He was a storyteller without peer. He created words as colorful and exotic and memorable as any our genre has ever seen."[70] Carl Yoke, his friend for 52 years, wrote, "I can't imagine a world without Roger in it. He and I had vowed to live forever. Death was not permitted."[96] Walter Jon Williams said, "if Roger's later works did not achieve the impact of his earlier work, possibly it was because the center of the field had shifted in his direction: his work stood out less because everyone else's work had become more like Roger's."[79] Neil Gaiman noted *Lord of Light*'s influence on his *Sandman* series and observed that Zelazny's "influence on all of us, both in comics and in fiction, was immeasurable. When he died, I wound up spreading the news around DC Comics, and lots of people who had never met Roger were broken up on a level I've only seen when rock stars died… I'd get these phone calls from people who took it personally. And one of the reasons that they took it personally was that he made the business of writing look interesting. A lot of writers are Roger's fault. There are a lot of us who without Roger (or if we hadn't read his stuff) would have gone off and done something more sensible."[53] In the afterword to *The Sandman Volume X: The Wake* Gaiman wrote, "Roger Zelazny died as I completed the first chapter of *The Wake,* and his memorial informed the second chapter."[97] He dedicated *American Gods* "For absent friends—Kathy Acker and Roger Zelazny, and all points between."[98]

The August 1995 issue of *Locus* contained appreciations from many writers, including Michael Bishop, Robert Silverberg, Norman Spinrad, George R. R. Martin, Joe Haldeman, Jack C. Haldeman II, Walter Jon Williams, and Edward Bryant. Charles N. Brown noted in his editorial, "Many of the appreciations in this issue—most came in unsolicited—expressed shock and horror. I feel strongly that an appreciation should be a warm and positive remembrance, or story, or anecdote about the person, not a wail against death, so some of these have been cut. I couldn't cut all of them, and understand how it was the first thought when people sat down to write."[99] Brown acknowledged the experimental nature of much of Zelazny's work. "Zelazny became fascinated with the technical problems of writing and characterization. He would write entire novels to test and experiment with possible solutions."[99]

Trent Zelazny wrote a poignant essay about how he'd been in denial that his father was going to die. He'd also not appreciated his father's writing while he was alive but grew to love it afterward, too late to tell him. "With the exception of a couple of pieces, I did not read my father's work while he was alive. Within a month of his death, I picked up *Nine Princes in Amber*…the book just blew me away. I have a special fondness for "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," *Dream Master,* and *My Name is Legion. Lonesome October* is up there too. I found a love for his writing, as well as newfound love for the man. I regret not reading his work while he was around.

I regret not being able to toss one of his books down in front of him and say 'This rocks.' I regret that I never got to tell him how proud I am of him."[100] Trent later said, "I curse myself constantly for not being able to tell him how truly brilliant I think he is/was."[7]

Dispersal of the Book Collection

Zelazny owned a vast number of books covering the sciences, humanities, and arts, collected over many years. Like Zelazny's ashes, his book collection was scattered to the winds after his death. Gregory Benford observed, ""I happened to be staying there in the home of another friend when, after Roger's death from cancer...his magnificent book collection [was sold] to a used book dealer."[101] From that local book store in Santa Fe some of Zelazny's books eventually found their way into the collections of his readers around the globe. The selection ranged from Zelazny's copies of his own novels to books on theoretical physics he had dog-eared, marked up, underlined, and signed his name in, to the very copy of Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* that had inspired Zelazny's 1962 return to science fiction.

Death, Cancer, and Cigarettes: a Retribution?

Until recently, Wikipedia, the Internet Movie Database, and other on-line biographies said that Zelazny died of lung cancer caused by cigarette smoking. Other on-line commentary (none of which will be cited here, to avoid giving them credence) proposes that Zelazny's premature death was retribution for a chain-smoking habit that he'd quit too late. He also appears in databases listing celebrities who died due to smoking. In a 2009 *Locus* review of *The Dead Man's Brother*, Richard Lupoff cited the 1971 novel's frequent references to cigarettes, adding that Zelazny's smoking "surely contributed to, if it did not actually cause, his death at age 58 from cancer."[102,103] George R. R. Martin responded to Lupoff in *Locus Online*, listing these facts: Zelazny switched to a pipe in the 1970s, quit altogether in the 1980s (there was a brief lapse), and died from colorectal cancer—not a cancer commonly associated with cigarette smoking.[104] However, neither Lupoff nor Martin was completely correct.

Zelazny died from metastatic colorectal cancer and kidney failure; the cancer and chemotherapy combined to destroy his kidney function. There is a modest link between colorectal cancer and cigarette smoking. While most of the carcinogens in cigarette smoke are inhaled, a smaller amount is swallowed, increasing the risk of colorectal cancer. It is impossible to determine whether smoking causes any one person's cancer or not; we can only say that the lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is 5.0% in nonsmokers and 5.9% in smokers.[105,106] Similarly, it is impossible to determine definitively if smoking contributed to Zelazny's death from this cancer; we can only say that his risk was somewhat higher than a non-smoker's.[105,106]

For those who assumed retribution from Zelazny's smoking history, there is no proof.

No Connection: Cancer, Continuing Amber, and Collaboration

Zelazny collaborated on novels with Philip K. Dick, Fred Saberhagen (twice), Thomas T. Thomas (twice), Robert Sheckley (thrice), and Gerald Hausman. He also finished an Alfred Bester novel and co-wrote two short stories with Dannie Plachta and one with Harlan Ellison.

He endured much criticism that his later work wasn't as good as what he'd written in the 1960s. But in the years after his death, some critics twisted the facts surrounding his death in their assessments about the quality of his later work. In reviews, essays, and blogs—none of which will be cited here—a common assertion grew that once Zelazny knew he was dying of cancer, he embarked on a whole series of collaborations—and even the Merlin series—in order to ensure his family's financial security. This notion is completely unfounded. He received the cancer diagnosis in early 1994 after all of those collaborative novels and the second Amber series were finished; only *A Farce to Be Reckoned With* and *Psychoshop* had not yet been published. Zelazny died the year after the diagnosis.

Collaboration wasn't something that Zelazny always enjoyed doing. "Oh, not particularly. It's sort of the same reason I'm not particularly interested in working for TV: the fact that the final product is not mine… I normally don't like to do it just because I like to do my own thing."[95] He collaborated with Dick "simply [because] I liked that particular story…and I have long been an admirer of Phil Dick."[95] He did the other collaborations for similar reasons: the project and the collaborator both appealed to him. And he approached each effort as yet another learning opportunity in the writing craft.

Posthumous Works

"The Three Descents of Jeremy Baker" appeared in July 1995 issue of the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction,* the last publication of a new Roger Zelazny short story in the sf magazines. Reprinted in *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, it ranked fifth on the Locus Poll for best short story. "Preludes and Postlude" and the Amber short stories, "Blue Horse, Dancing Mountains" and "Hall of Mirrors," each appeared in original anthologies in the months after his death. Remembrances occurred at science fiction conventions during the following year.

Distinctions:

Nebula nomination for novel *A Night in the Lonesome October*
Euclid Public Schools Alumni Association
Distinguished Achievement Hall of Fame
New York Public Library Best Adventure Book
for the Teen Age (for *Wilderness*)

Books Published:

A Farce to Be Reckoned With
Forever After
Warriors of Blood and Dream
Wheel of Fortune

1996

Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation

Prior to his death, Zelazny was excited about a new poetry chapbook in the works, *Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation.* It was the first full appearance of "Ikhnaton's Hymn to the Sun," portions of which headed chapters in the collaborative novel *Flare.* The chapbook also included poetry extracted from *Lord of Light* and *Eye of Cat.*

The movie *Dragonheart* premiered, and some moviegoers commented that the story contained recognizable elements of Zelazny's "The George Business," including a business deal between dragon and dragon slayer in order to scam the public.[107–109] Zelazny received no acknowledgment in the credits; had he been alive, or had the Estate been more effective at the time in guarding its intellectual property, either could have challenged this lapse. It is ironic that "The George Business" was the same story plagiarized by a high school student in 1985 to win a state-wide contest in Michigan.

Distinction:

Locus Poll short story #5: "The Three Descents of Jeremy Baker"

Books Published:

Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation
The Williamson Effect

1997

Donnerjack

Zelazny had worked intermittently on the first Donnerjack novel since 1992, and the Zelazny Archives at Syracuse University contain handwritten drafts of complete sections dated 1993 and later. When he realized that he might not be able to finish the trilogy, he discussed it at length with Jane Lindskold. "At the end when he realized he wasn't going to make it, he asked me to finish the two books he had pending. He said I was the only person who had a shot at doing them in a spirit near to what he intended. He never outlined. There was nothing except conversations we'd had. He'd written about a third of *Donnerjack* and somewhat less of *Lord Demon*."[110]

Lindskold had the trilogy's original proposal, and using the details that they had discussed, she finished one volume that encompasses the trilogy's scope. This is why the book is longer than the typical Zelazny novel,[71,111] but it is impossible to tell how much of the trilogy survives in it. Only Zelazny knew the full story, if he knew it at all.

After *Donnerjack*'s publication, readers pressed Lindskold—sometimes rudely—to pinpoint exactly where she took over. Some of them "knew" the precise location by a perceived change in style. Lindskold has declined to answer. Some readers declared that the break point must have been when John D'Arcy Donnerjack, Sr., abruptly died, believing it unlikely that Zelazny would kill him off. But Zelazny's handwritten sketch of the trilogy shows that Donnerjack, Sr. would die exactly as described, and the story would then focus on his son. Author William Sanders, who knew Zelazny and Lindskold quite well and had first-hand information about the book's creation, said, "Jane boldly disassembled Roger's beginning chapters and rearranged the whole structure of the novel. This is another reason it is so hard to tell who wrote what; Roger's original text is not printed as an integral whole but is distributed in hunks and chunks through the present book. More boldly still, she completely rewrote certain parts and threw out bits that didn't work. She acted, that is, as a genuine collaborator, not just a posthumous amanuensis—which was exactly what Roger had asked her to do."[33]

It wasn't easy, mourning her closest friend while trying to complete his novels. "If I had to make the same choices I'd still do it [complete the novels], but it was rough, and made harder by the fact that on some level his typeface was like his voice."[110] "More than anything else, I wanted those last two books to be worthy of Roger. I had already read just about everything he had published when I wrote the biography. Now I remembered something he had said about how he went about writing his part of *Deus Irae*, a novel he wrote with Philip K. Dick. He hadn't tried to write like Dick; instead he had studied Dick's prose until he could manage what he called a 'meta' style, blending his own and Dick's. I followed Roger's lead, studied his tricks, remembered his story values—which were sometimes quite different from mine. I'm too close to both projects to say if I succeeded, but readers and reviewers seem to like the novels. What I can assuredly say is that the entire thing was a tremendous learning experience."[112]

Book Published:

Donnerjack

——————1998——————

Lord of the Fantastic

An anthology of original stories and essays paid tribute to Zelazny in 1998. Contributor William Sanders suggested the title *Roger, Over* *and Out*[113]—it would have been entirely in keeping with Zelazny's penchant for puns, but the editors and publisher worried that it might seem disrespectful. Many of the contributing authors reminisced about Zelazny in afterwords to their stories; a sampling of quotes follows:

Fred Saberhagen spoke intensely. "Avoiding quarrels as he did, he also disliked confrontations; and a further extension of this principle led him to steer clear of saying or doing anything that might produce an unpleasant reaction in whoever was around him, particularly friends and loved ones. This behavior made him an unfailing pleasant companion. But it also had a downside, when it denied people information they would have deemed of great importance, however unpalatable—such as the fact that Roger Zelazny was dying of cancer. When he died I was angry with him, and now, almost two years later, I think I still am, not only for leaving us all here Rogerless but for keeping the imminence of his departure such a secret."[74]

Walter Jon Williams said, "He was gracious, soft-spoken, witty, and (when he wanted to be) screamingly funny. He gave the two funniest guest-of-honor speeches I've ever heard, and it is my eternal regret that no one ever thought to record them. He spoke with eloquence—in long, spontaneous, unrehearsed, grammatically correct complex sentences—on subjects ranging from poetry to philosophy to particle physics… He was at heart a very shy man and did not seek out company… It was clear that in his last year Roger was a happy man, and it was a joy to watch him."[69]

Robert Silverberg wrote, "I lament him because he was such a sweet and completely lovable man… I knew him for almost thirty years…in all those three decades I never heard him utter an unkind word about anyone."[114]

Distinctions:

Locus Poll all-time best sf novel prior to 1990 #14: *Lord of Light*
Locus Poll all-time best fantasy novel prior to 1990 #9: *Nine Princes in Amber*
Locus Poll #13 all-time best sf novelist
Locus Poll #6 all-time best fantasy novelist
Locus Poll #9 all-time best novelist

Books Published:

Psychoshop
Lord of the Fantastic

1999

Lord Demon

After *Donnerjack* Jane Lindskold completed Zelazny's other unfinished novel. It is unclear how much Zelazny actually drafted; the Syracuse University Archives contain no fragments of handwritten manuscript. Some have speculated that Lindskold wrote *Lord Demon* entirely, but this was not the case. Zelazny had finished complete sections, and for an interval in 1994 and 1995, distracted from *Donnerjack*, he'd worked instead on *Lord Demon*.[78] Lindskold said that, compared to *Donnerjack*, Zelazny had written "somewhat less of *Lord Demon*."[110]

Distinctions:

Locus Poll all-time best collection #18: *Four for Tomorrow*
Locus Poll all-time best collection #34:
  The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth and Other Stories
Locus Poll all-time best novella #14: "He Who Shapes"
Locus Poll all-time best novella #16: "Home Is the Hangman"
Locus Poll all-time best novelette #3: "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"
Locus Poll all-time best novelette #11: "For a Breath I Tarry"
Locus Poll all-time best novelette #34: "Unicorn Variation"
Locus Poll all-time best novelette #52:
  "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"
Locus Poll #5 all-time short fiction writer
Locus Poll #15 all-time best sf author
Locus Poll #5 all-time best fantasy author

Book Published:

Lord Demon

2000–2007

The Last Defender of Camelot (again) and *Manna from Heaven*

ibooks planned to reissue Zelazny's collections and novels, and their 2001 version of *The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth* combined the original collection with the remaining two stories from *Four for Tomorrow.* The publisher asked Robert Silverberg to assemble a "best of" collection of Zelazny stories and to write an introduction. In 2002 *The Last Defender of Camelot,* Zelazny's sixth collection, came out, unfortunately bearing the same title as an earlier publication which had completely different stories. Only one story in the new book ("Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love") was not previously collected. New editions of *This Immortal, Damnation Alley, The Dream Master, Changeling,* and *Madwand* were released, as were odd two-in-one pairings: *Eye of Cat* with *Isle of the Dead,* and *To Die in Italbar* with *A Dark Travelling.* ibooks commissioned John Betancourt to write the Amber prequel novels described earlier in this monograph, and four of five appeared between 2002 and 2005 before the publisher's bankruptcy.

A fan (Scott Zrubek) assembled the seventh collection, *Manna from Heaven,* intermixing previously collected tales with uncollected stories from the 1960s to 1990s. The title resembles the included (and previously collected) short story "Mana from Heaven." Zrubek (whose name was misspelled on the title page) submitted the collection under his preferred title *Mana from Heaven,* but the publisher changed the spelling.[115] Many readers concluded that *Manna from Heaven* was a typo, but the change produced a pun that Zelazny would have enjoyed.[116,117] *Mana* is a supernatural force; *manna* is food from the heavens or unexpected help. Zrubek included "The Three Descents of Jeremy Baker" and the short-short "Tunnel Vision," but the publisher removed both without telling him.[115] John Betancourt (Wildside Press) and Warren Lapine (DNA Publications) were joint publishers of the book; in conversation with this biographer, Lapine took credit for the pun *Manna* and indicated that Betancourt was responsible for the dropped stories and other problems with the book's printing overseas.[117] Lapine chose Bob Eggleton's cover artwork because it suited the deleted tale about Jeremy Baker's descent through a singularity; without that story the choice of cover art seems incongruous. Rumors that the collaborative tale "Come to Me

Not in Winter's White" was reprinted without Harlan Ellison's permission appear unfounded; Lapine said that he obtained permission directly from his friend Ellison.[117] Moreover, the editors of *The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny* discovered that the version of "Come to Me Not in Winter's White" printed in *Manna from Heaven* included revisions made by Ellison specifically for that edition.

Distinctions:

2005 Locus Poll all-time best fantasy story #16:
"The Last Defender of Camelot"
2005 Locus Poll all-time best fantasy story #32: "Unicorn Variation"

Books Published:

The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth [revised]
The Last Defender of Camelot ["best of" collection with
stories different from previous book with that title]
Manna from Heaven

—2008 and Beyond—

The Quotable Zelazny

The Internet now abounds with quotes both rightly and wrongly attributed to Roger Zelazny. Confusing the message and the messenger, extracts from his fiction appear out of context as if they were Zelazny's own beliefs. For example, "While I had often said that I wanted to die in bed, what I really meant was that in my old age I wanted to be stepped on by an elephant while making love," was not about Zelazny himself; it was Corwin's sardonic remark in *The Guns of Avalon*. "Life is full of doors that don't open when you knock, equally spaced amid those that open when you don't want them to," came from Merlin in *Blood of Amber*. Warrior-priest Madrak, not Zelazny, uttered "The Agnostic's Prayer"—but it is arguable that Zelazny shared Madrak's beliefs.

Fans and colleagues have attributed other aphorisms to Zelazny, recalling them from convention speeches, writing seminars, correspondence, and private conversations. It is often unclear whether he originated the quote, such as his 1970s anecdote about Schenectady, NY, being the source of a science fiction writer's ideas. Zelazny may have said, "Before you can write well enough to publish, you have to write a million words of shit," but apparently so did Raymond Chandler, Norman Mailer, and Stephen King. In other cases, Zelazny admittedly was not the first. When he said, "Good writers borrow. Great writers steal," he was stealing from one of his favorite poets, T. S. Eliot, who wrote, "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal." Pablo Picasso stole from T. S. Eliot—or vice versa—when Picasso reportedly remarked, "Good artists borrow. Great artists steal." Zelazny stood in good company with that adage.

Unlike the Internet entries, all Zelazny quotations in this monograph come from his interviews, correspondence, and essays; in a few instances, his colleagues and friends recalled his words from personal conversations.

Fading from Sight?

Publication of a new novel often prompts reissue of an author's previous works. An author who stops publishing or who dies can disappear from store bookshelves, fading from view and memory. The works of only a few, including Frank Herbert, Isaac Asimov, and Philip K. Dick, remain popular and undergo ongoing adaptations for film and television. The 1998 Locus Poll ranked Zelazny's *Lord of Light* #14 for all-time best sf novel prior to 1990, and *Nine Princes in Amber* ranked #9 for all-time best fantasy novel prior to 1990. In the 1999 Locus All-Time Poll, Zelazny finished #5 on the list of best all-time short fiction writers; six of his classic novellas and novelettes ranked highly, as did his first two short story collections. In a 2008 poll, over 3,000 readers of the UK magazine *SFX* voted Zelazny #30 of the top 100 Science Fiction and Fantasy authors of all time. His "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" was one of the pieces of classic "Martian literature" included on the DVD *Visions of Mars: First Library on Mars*, attached to the *Phoenix* Mars lander and brought safely to the Martian surface on May 25, 2008.[118] Also in 2008, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Mars Rover project named a large crater on Mars after him.[119]

Had he lived, no doubt Zelazny would have received the Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of North America. In fact, many readers—and the publishers of *Psychoshop*—have assumed that he *was* awarded Grand Master. Current rules do not allow for a posthumous award. The Science Fiction Hall of Fame in Seattle finally inducted him in 2010.

In the 2012 All-Time Locus Poll, six Zelazny novels finished in the top 200, including *Nine Princes in Amber* (#5, fantasy) and *Lord of Light* (#23, SF). Nine shorter works appeared in the top 100 of their categories, including "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" (#3, novelette).

Zelazny's popularity endures but shows signs of fading. His 10-novel Amber series was reissued in 1999 in a massive omnibus, *The Great Book of Amber*; somewhere around its thirtieth edition, it remains in print. Today, only *The Great Book of Amber, Lord of Light,* and *Deus Irae* are likely to be found in bookstores, if at all. Zelazny's most popular work (*Nine Princes in Amber*) and his best novel (*Lord of Light*) remain in print—written back to back in 1966/67—but much of Zelazny's work is out of print.

We hope that this collection of Zelazny's short fiction and poetry will reaffirm his scope, artistry, and originality as a storyteller. His work merits additional republication for the benefit of current and potential fans. This monograph and the autobiographical notes accompanying many of the shorter works illuminate the process that led this man to create so many fine stories and enduring characters.

Distinctions:

SFX: #30 all-time Top 100 Science Fiction and Fantasy authors
"A Rose for Ecclesiastes" included in *Visions of Mars:*
    First Library on Mars, DVD on board *Phoenix* Mars Lander
2009 Geffen Award for *This Immortal* (translated into Hebrew)
2010 Inducted into The Science Fiction Hall of Fame
2010 Locus Poll Best Collection #2:
    The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny, vols 1–6
2011 Locus Poll Best Collection #4 & #6:
    The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny, vol 5 & vol 6 (resp.)
Numerous placements in the 2012 All-Time Locus Poll

Books Published:

The Dead Man's Brother
The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny, volumes 1–6
The Ides of Octember: A Bibliography of Roger Zelazny
Magic: (October 1961–October1967) Ten Tales by Roger Zelazny
Seven Tales in Amber

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A note about the format of references:

JOURNALS/MAGAZINES/FANZINES

Author. Title of article. *Journal Name.* Year; Volume (Issue Number [#Whole Number and/or Month]): pages.

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Author. Title of article. In: Editor. *Book Title.* City, State: Publisher, Year: pages.

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CURIOSITIES

SANDOW'S SHADOW
(OUTLINE)

Written in the early 1990s; previously unpublished.
§ *Francis Sandow*

[The first two pages or approximately 650 words of handwritten manuscript are missing. As the story opens, Francis Sandow is exploring an artificial pocket universe inexplicably placed into stasis.]

Sandow circumnavigated the globe. Most customers did not even know that such a stasis-device existed, its only use being for maintenance purposes. And this indicated that the person who shut down the pocket universe had had more than a little training in the area. Enough—Sandow smiled ironically—to locate the key…

As he passed over city after city, admiring the skylines and high mountains with great waterfalls, he automatically began contemplating general weather patterns. This person liked real seasons, not just minor fluctuations…

He smiled. Bell. He was looking at an unknown work by one of the true masters—Chesley Bell.

Bell had been dead for centuries now—Sandow had attended the funeral in hard-holo—but he had done some work for God's Pockets long ago. It had apparently waited in file until the proper customer had come along. He wondered whether all of the universes in question were Bell's work.

Bell did like his mountain ranges and high cataracts. Sandow seeks a cave to run these [pocket universes] from. The second planet possessed the best collection. He promptly entered the coordinates and napped.

Later, on awakening, he hovered above the absolute stillness of one of the highest falls he had ever seen. He scanned it for masked caverns. There were several. No special reason to favor one over the others. So, on a whim, he chose the middle one. Drifting in, he looked about, casting illumination everywhere. He wanted to be able to make orbit in a hurry if the key activated something else as well.

He sat and pondered. He could think of no reason for shutting things down, and things he did not understand frightened him. He opened up the doorways of his mind and waited. Was this a situation worth inviting Shimbo to?—Shimbo of Darktree Tower, Shrugger of Thunders? The ancient Pei'an deity with whom he enjoyed a peculiar bond when working in complicated areas?

No, he decided at length. Ultimately, Shimbo's interest might provide a self-summoning—but let that come when it would. Sandow liked to handle things of this sort on his own for so far as he could take them.

He felt a line of force from ahead and to the left. Checking his personal arsenal, he cracked the *Model T*'s hatch and stepped out into the cave.

Yes; he followed in that direction, realizing that the key was not a full physical object. When he reached a point—a pinkish mineral vein—he placed his hand upon it. It was a power-pull of the sort he had worked with for ages. How did this one want to be dealt with? He stood there, extending into it, and let it tell him.

Then he began moving his hands through the ritualistic sequence he had determined would unlock it. Abruptly, however, he heard a sound of thunder from without the cave. This should not be. In fact, it was technically impossible. Unless…

Unless his Pei'an alter ego Shimbo was trying to warn him of something, and he'd a feeling that this was the case. Completing the final gestures, he broke and ran back to the *Model T*. Diving inside, he let it secure itself as he activated both systems and shields. Even as he rose from the cave floor, the walls began to slide and tumble about him. There came a point where he had to burn his way through. He was buffeted for a moment by the cataract. Then he was free, moving outward and upward.

"Vessel emerging from cataract," came a radio broadcast. "You are trespassing on private property. Would you please land and identify yourself?"

"Negative," Sandow replied. "I just did you one big favor, and I don't have time for another."

"I must insist."

"Me, too."

The *Model T* took off at an enormous pace. Its exit key was ready.

"I don't understand what's been going on here, but I want to. I *will* fire."

"I might have been more cooperative if you hadn't just threatened me. Good-bye."

Sandow activated the transportal code.

He departed the area quickly, more than a little puzzled at the treatment he had received. He made his way to Dyce, a completely Dysonized universe—oxygen available throughout scattered multitudes of small worldlets connected by bridges, freeform structures the size of entire cities drifting in space. Finding the key in one such, he releases the universe from its stasis and is again treated as if he were an enemy. Again he departs in a hurry.

Next, he visits Jungen, the archetypal universe, also in stasis. He decides to leave it that way. The same for Cabal, the magical universe. While Dyce seems an experimental piece of Chesley Bell's, Cabal is the work of someone Sandow does not recognize. From its roughness in some places he takes it as the work of some new person just out of his apprenticeship.

Next he decides to visit Aurons, a pocket universe whose principal world is semi-desert. He arrives to find it intact and functioning. Entering under the guise of every stealth-type device at his command, he seeks the key. He recognizes the pocket universe as the work of the late Nizzim Rochter, an alien bearing a vague resemblance to a kangaroo rat, who specialized in dry climate worlds. This design could have been on file, too, or it could have been commissioned long ago.

Locating the key—a large mass of opal in an enlarged grotto, to be manipulated through a complex series of rotations, Sandow finds that another has beaten him to it, a dark-haired, short individual who is even now studying the thing.

Emerging from his invisible vessel, Sandow approaches the man and the opal. "I'd like to have a few words with you," he says, holding his hands out from his body.

The man stares, studying him.

"Francis Sandow," he says. "I'd heard it was almost impossible to get you off of Homefree. If this is because of me, I'm quite flattered."

"I don't recall our having met," Sandow responds.

The other smiled. "I'll be glad to tell you all about it in just a bit. I'd like to shut this world down first, though."

"Mind if I ask why?"

"I'd rather hold that till afterwards."

"All right. I'll be glad to shut it down for you right now if you'd like. I see how it's set up."

"Go ahead."

Sandow began to manipulate the giant opal. After perhaps fifteen minutes he felt the world slide into stasis.

"Fair enough," the other said. "Do you want to talk here or someplace else?"

"If you've a sufficient supply of terplant juice, let's talk here. It seems the safest place in this universe."

The other laughed hoarsely and took a swig from his canteen.

"You never made me a great worldscaper. But that wasn't why I came to you. Fifty years to learn the preliminaries. I needed that along with a bunch of other things."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Sandow said. "There is something familiar about you, but I can't really place you."

The man's face twisted and rippled. "Face-folding," he stated. "I have three I can go into. It took three operations and over a year's training to learn them."

"Milo Monkson!" Sandow said.

The other laughed. "None other. Studied with you for over twenty years. Learned a lot."

"Why'd you quit? You'd have made a good worldscaper. But you just took off one day."

The man laughed again. "That's my way," he replied. "I spent five years with the martial arts masters of Quinn V and just took off one day, too. Blew through the Champagne School for Musicians, also without telling my coordinator. Like the wind. Was even a cop for two years. And I have a doctorate in history. Studied sleight-of-hand with a magician for six months also."

"Impressive resumé," Sandow said. "I'd be glad to hire you just to kill off my mistakes."

Milo slapped him on the shoulder. Sandow had read the move as benign even before it was started. "Thanks, boss. But I've something else I have to deal with first."

"That being?"

"I've seven universes to shut down."

"Why, for God's sake?"

"Long story."

Sandow checked his Time Geni. "I have over half a day."

"…but I have quite a bit myself."

"I'd like to hear your story. Buy you dinner?"

They hastened back to the *Model T*, where mess prepared them a gourmet meal with an exotic beer.

"Good stuff," Milo remarked, smacking his lips. "But then you always were a gourmet, boss."

"Not always. But I take it when I can get it."

After awhile, Milo tells his story:

"I was born and lived my first twelve years in the mining town of Raidadenc Ban in the Shingta Basin on the planet Pasqua. You may have heard of the Pasquas Wipeout. Seven of the most able space pirates of the day united to rape the world. Their combined forces stole everything worth stealing, melt-mined the most volatile minerals from orbit, sold every able bodied person they could capture in slavery in the infamous warrens of Galloo slave mart, and executed everyone else they could find with a slow-burn over all the areas of major habitation. Afterwards they divided the spoils, retired, and bought new identities and respectability. Much later, when the trails had gone cold and the money old, they bought their own universes—the seven that I am shutting down before I go in to kill them.

"I'm a survivor of the Pasquas Wipeout. I saw them kill off all of my family except for my grandmother Dolba. She'd been a Ditren Commando in her younger days, and she still had all the combat implants in her body. She arrived home from her weekly night out with her friends, saw what was happening, and wiped out the squad of pirates who were doing it. Dolba then got me out of the town—fighting two engagements along the way—and into the hills, where we took refuge in one of the abandoned mines. That's how we survived the slow-burn. But at one point she left me there for several hours. When she returned, she was injured, but she'd learned who was behind the operation. She made me memorize a lot of other things while we waited. She taught me to live off the damaged land, though we did find some food stores later.

"Then months later we were rescued by a freighter. They made regular stops in the Shingta Basin. She had offworld relatives and money. She raised me then and worked out the training I would need to find the seven and destroy them. She died when I was seventeen, leaving me the money to pursue this bizarre education. The use of her adjuncts at an advanced age may or may not have accelerated the aging process.

"I swore on her grave that I would do it, and I did. It was her that really conceived of operation Shrike—nailing them all."

"Why shrike?"

"A shrike is a ruthless killer bird. That's what I'd become to go after them."

"I see."

"Now I am about my business—Operation Shrike."

"Care to tell me more about the people you're after?" Sandow asks.

Milo does, and the tableau runs like this:

RULER	UNIVERSE	FEATURES OF MAJOR WORLD
Detco—A brain in a fluid-filled sphere with a collection of bodies he can switch into—not all of them human. Limited psi powers.	Urbs	Totally urbanized world; museum-like where not utilized; many sculpture gardens.
Ishro Vadan—Gorgeous human body, brunette, with a scar on her left cheek and an artificial left hand (which is a multipurpose weapon).	Jungen	Dreamlike place, filled with haunts and archetypes.
Mica—A big human guy with so many cyborg replacements he could pass as something artificial.	Dyce	A fully Dysonized universe; atmosphere everywhere, bridges between wordlets, planets, floating cities; ships sail between worlds; some people drive Cyberpunk-like "bridges" who hang out between worlds.
Avalon Greer—Male, human, sorcerer.	Cabal	City of brass, city of iron, city of glass, cities of incredible precious and semiprecious stones, etc. Magic works here.

Dwisdor—Very tall, thin, humanoid male. Amazing speed of reflexes; shapeshifter, also; can change colors, chameleon-like. Pet, giant blood tarantula.	Aurons	Desert world; Arabian nights-like cities.
Merriwind Tatchet—Very mod-looking body; might as well be a dream figure; can warp reality for a distance of 100 feet or so.	Vestry	Dali-like places of wonder. Many limp watches hung on treelimbs. Alice-in-Wonderland feeling.
Alachra—Something big and thick within a dark cassock-like garment, hooded. Three green glowing eyes beneath hood. Might even be a tall quadruped under all those garments, gender male.	Fortune	Casino world with big rugged expanses—rock, sand, forest—where duels are regularly fought.

Having heard Milo's story and learned these particulars, Sandow admits to having restored the first two worlds. Milo is furious, moves to attack Sandow. Sandow dodges several attacks without retaliating. Finally, Milo halts and says, "You didn't know." Then he sits down, head in hands. After a time, he says "They may be on to me now. May not, also, of course. My best bet is to take out Dwisdor quickly and move on."

Sandow says, "I'll help."

Dwisdor and his own questors are subject to a fire-alarm-type effect (as are the others). In [unintelligible] millions—as his world is being shut down—he is twisted with a personal time-effect of the sort Sandow and Milo are using. Duel scenes with Sandow and Milo—fighting corpses, gem-studded cave of Ali Baba, time-astounded djinn (in vicinity)—and the blood tarantula (Slyve) of near-human intelligence. Sandow's archer's eye detects a massive land mass frozen in mid-slide. He pushes the action in that direction till their time fields activate the slide, crushing Dwisdor and Slyve.

They split up after that for a battle involving Sandow's confrontation with Merriweather Tatchet, who summons warped demons of his past which drive him half-mad, till Shimbo intervenes with meteorological distortions which permit him to regain control of himself—also, of the mad environment (one must have been at least half mad at one time to gain this power). Dueling then with Merriweather, he succeeds in turning one of her own nightmare creations against her and sees her eaten by it.

Milo, in the next battle, proceeds against Mica for a deadly martial arts duel amid the Dysonized worldlets—fighting atop and inside, clusters of floating jewels, on the bridgeways between the worlds, in abundant floating costumes, in the guts of a giant computer, moving from point to point amid the toy worlds of a solar system the size of a football field. Milo's martial arts skills did not fully prepare him for a man who seems part robot—but, displacing the orbits of worlds in the mini-system, he is finally able to trap Milo between two which are about to collide.

Sandow and Milo team up to go against Avalon Greer, the sorcerer. After a lively chase sequence (with Sandow's companion finally cracking the language of Avalon's spells) they corner the man in the dungeons of his Ruby Biome. As they move in for the kill, they are defeated by the arrival of Detco and Ishro Vadan, who had compared notes concerning the mysterious shutdowns and revivals of their respective universes. They have realized that some single individual is behind it all, though they have not yet determined him to be a survivor of the Pasqua Wipeout. However, Milo makes a point of informing his target as to who he is and why he's doing what he's doing, to make his revenge complete—and he had just finished telling this to Avalon Greer in anticipation of his death. Hard-pressed, he and Sandow escape with their lives by finding a flaw in the great Ruby and playing their lasers upon it. They make it back to the *Model T* and Milo's *Shrike* and split the scene just a mile ahead of the posse.

Safe in subspace later, immersed in tubs of healing gel and passing a pitcher of Martinis (a totally out-of-common drink most bartenders, human and otherwise, have never heard of). Milo had asked for a popular drink, but Sandow had persuaded him to try the ancient mix.

["Give me a Twi."

["A what?"

["A drink with ice colade."

["Crap. Try something decent—like a Martini."

["What the hell's a Martini?"

["Try it and see."]

While resting and sipping, they plot their next campaign.

A Word from Zelazny

Francis Sandow remains one of Zelazny's most popular characters with three appearances: in *Isle of the Dead*, in "Dismal Light," and a cameo in *To Die in Italbar*. "Every now and then I think about doing something more with Francis Sandow, the protagonist in my novel *Isle of the Dead*; it's a possibility I could go back to that world."[1] Zelazny returned to Sandow in the early 1990s with this outline for a novel or perhaps a graphic novel.

Zelazny differentiated Sandow and Conrad, "in a way Sandow is more civilized than Conrad. Basically, Conrad likes to be out on his ship or out in the woods. He enjoys knocking around; he has a sense of the Earth spirit. Whereas, I see Sandow as more of an urban type figure. He's a recluse; he's got all the amenities at his place. Sandow is more self-conscious than Conrad, and there's an ironic streak in his nature. He laughs at himself more. He's also an observer, watching what he's doing and, possibly, being cynical about his own actions. He's reflecting on what he is doing, and he's able to laugh at it. Conrad doesn't think at that sophisticated level. He exists purely for the moment and doesn't reflect on things the same way."[2]

Notes

Written on yellow legal paper, the undated, handwritten manuscript is nine pages long; the first two pages and title are missing. It appears to be written on the same pad as *Psychoshop* (hand-dated 1993) and *Donnerjack* (also hand-dated 1993), and all three manuscripts lie in the same folder. Those facts and the story's references to cyberpunk imply that it was probably written in the early 1990s, over twenty years after Zelazny last visited the character. We have titled this outline "Sandow's Shadow" for the purpose of this collection.

This sketch evidently formed the foundation for the *Chronomaster* game (designed by Zelazny and Jane Lindskold and released in 1995) and *Chronomaster* novel (written by Jane Lindskold), in which "retired planet sculptor and terraformer" Rene Korda investigates why several artificial pocket universes have been placed in stasis.[3] A ship named *Shrike* also appears in the novel, but it adds elements not present in Zelazny's outline, such as a "meddlesome ship's computer named Jester."[4] Zelazny's contribution to the game appears to have been allowing this outline's adaptation instead of writing it as a Sandow story. Lindskold wrote the game's script, dialogue, and the tie-in novel.[5]

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[1] Letter from Zelazny to Larry Ashmead, Doubleday, February 13, 1967.

[2] *Roger Zelazny* by Theodore Krulik, Ungar 1986.

[3] *Roger Zelazny and Jane Lindskold's Chronomaster [The Game]*, IntraCorp Entertainment and Dreamforge Entertainment 1995.

[4] *Roger Zelazny and Jane Lindskold's Chronomaster [A Novel]*, by Jane Lindskold, Prima 1996.

[5] Email from Jane Lindskold to Dr. Christopher Kovacs dated August 3, 2007.

SHADOWLAND
(OUTLINE)

First draft written circa 1979; revised 1993; previously unpublished.
§ *Shadowjack*

SETTING: the world of *Jack of Shadows*, before the action in that book takes place. The planet rotates, the sun rises (in the west) and sets (in the east). Half of this world is forested, castled, primitive, inhabited by a feudal aristocracy of sorcerers and sorceresses. The other hemisphere is bleak and barren and empty. High atop Mt. Panicus, on the border between the inhabited and uninhabited realms bides a demonic-appearing being named Morningstar, whose torso merges with the rock of the mountain itself. He faces the east eternally, and seen from that side he appears to be only a strange statue. It is said that he may never look upon the rising sun, or the world as everyone knows it will come to an end. He watches sunsets. He is virtually omniscient.

The story opens with a youth—a sorcerer's apprentice named Alex—climbing in the mountains for a forbidden glimpse of Morningstar. The sun sets, and a strange, brilliantly lighted city (futuristic, aircars circling its towers) appears from nowhere in the distant waste. Startled, Alex loses his footing and rolls down a slope, to land too near Morningstar. The horned giant seizes him and laughs. No spell can bind this strange being, so Alex pleads with him to release him. Morningstar surprises him by complying, after telling him that he has beheld a part of his destiny on the plain beyond. Alex begins to flee, and Morningstar tells him that he will be back for the rest of the story very soon, for even his master—an old sorcerer named Arkans—will be unable to help him in what is to come. "Run if you must, but tell him what you have beheld," he adds.

Alex flees through the mountain range for much of the night. He can still see the city in the distance, until the light of morning falls upon it. Then it fades and vanishes. He returns to the Keep of the ancient sorcerer he serves: Arkans. He tells the obviously ailing old man what he has seen. Arkans nods and says, "It has come too soon—or too late." He explains then that he has foreseen a personal encounter with a very powerful sorcerer—Brelt—who has been engaging in magical duels with other sorcerers, slaying them and absorbing their powers. He is now probably too strong for Arkans to oppose successfully—and Arkans is certain that he is next on the list. He did not understand why the man suddenly desired such powers as he was achieving until just now, when he heard Alex's story.

He tells the youth how there was once a world of both cities and countryside where both magic and science coexisted. The urban centers were the scientific, mechanized places. The rural areas were the home of magic. One day in that world, long ago, an argument occurred between two brothers—one a mighty sorcerer, the other a great technician—as to which approach to life was superior. There was no satisfactory conclusion, so the sorcerer went away for several years and forged a powerful magical device—a wand like no other which had ever existed. During this time, the technician built a device, a portable keyboard instrument, the vibrations of which could affect the molecular structure of virtually anything. They agreed to fight a duel, pitting these devices against each other.

The battle which ensued lasted for several days with no clear victor. In the course of it, however, the forces released were so potent that they wrenched the fabric of reality itself, sundering the realm of magic from that of science, separating the two domains in the spacetime continuum—so that somewhere there is a world the exact opposite of their own, with cities where magic does not work, and large, dead, barren areas which had once been countryside. Periodically—like once every century, more or less—the two worlds merge again for 24 hours. For three nights in advance of this, each glimpses the other as a ghostly presence in their own barren area. There is, he says, something which must be done during this period of time. It has been attempted many times in the past and has always failed.

When the brothers had fought and the worlds were initially torn apart, there had been a last desperate engagement, reducing them to hand to hand combat. During the course of this conflict both weapons were temporarily abandoned. When the sundering began and each realized what was occurring, he seized the nearest fallen weapon—the other's. Now, the strange machine is in the magical realm, where it will not work, and the wand is in the other place, where *it* will not work. He, Arkans, is the guardian of the machine, he explains, and there will probably be an attempt to steal it back during the 24 hours when the worlds coincide.

During this time both magic and science will work in both places as in days gone by—only Arkans has no idea how the machine works, as there has never been any way for him to test it.

Arkans tells Alex then that it is suddenly imperative that he undertake a mission to the other realm to steal the wand. (This, too, has been attempted in the past.) Whoever holds the device appropriate for his own world could rule the place. This, he concludes, must be why Brelt is amassing power. He intends to obtain the wand for himself.

Before Arkans can go into more detail a baleful star seems to drop from the firmament, growing larger and brighter, until the entire window is filled with a ruddy light. Brelt then steps in, exchanges a few words with Arkans and attacks him magically, ignoring Alex. The old man is no match for his attacker, and he begins to fall back. As the battle progresses, and Arkans is apparently mortally wounded but still defending himself, Alex feels a great anger rise within him at seeing his master so abused. He summons his own fledgling powers and unleashes a magical bolt which takes Brelt completely by surprise, his attention focused upon Arkans. Brelt falls, himself mortally stricken. His accumulated powers pass to Alex, the only fit magical receptacle about. Alex, glowing strangely, goes to Arkans' side and asks him what he should do. The old man tells him that now he must guard the machine rather than attempt to steal the wand—and to send someone else after the latter device. He tries to tell him why they should have the wand and deny the others their machine but dies before he can explain this. (If either instrument is returned to the proper realm the realms will come to coexist on one plane again. If either realm has both instruments, it will dominate the world. If both are returned to their proper planes, the realms will coexist, but the polarity will be intensified in peculiar ways.)

Alex is left with two dead sorcerers, uncertain as to how he might execute his orders. He recalls then the words of Morningstar and decides that he must ask his advice.

He journeys back to Mt. Panicus, arriving at sunset, and he speaks with Morningstar. Morningstar agrees with Arkans that if Alex attempts to recover the wand himself, the machine will probably be stolen. Plus he is now the strongest sorcerer in the realm; he should stay by it and use his powers to guard it. Who then should he send after the wand? he asks. Morningstar suggests he employ the services of a professional thief. There is one called Shadowjack that he would recommend as being at the top of his profession. Alex asks how he is to find him, and Morningstar calls his name, which Jack can hear whenever it is spoken in shadow. Morningstar then stretches his great arms and pinions, and a long bat-like shadow stretches back across the land.

Jack, dallying in an inn or brothel, hears his name spoken and moves to the window. He sees the advancing shadow, fetches his cloak, and steps out upon the spreading darkness which he rides like an escalator into the heights, stepping forth before the young sorcerer. Jack agrees to undertake the mission on Morningstar's recommendation. Apparently there is some bond between them. So Jack heads west, then, to steal the wand from the booby-trapped, well guarded stronghold, as Morningstar has described it to him.

Alex returns to his master's Keep to watch over the machine. While doing so, he passes the time in conjuring up visions of the distant city where the wand lies. He witnesses some of Jack's difficulties in gaining entrance to the city, locating the stronghold, and entering there—*e.g.*, at one point Jack moves a piece of furniture to cast a shadow across a room which is criss-crossed by laser beams at the slightest pressure on the floor. He bridges it by flowing across the shadow—but the piece of furniture is accidentally removed thereafter, precluding his return via that route… Alex is distracted, however, by the comings and goings of a lovely girl in and about the technological center.

We follow Jack as he locates the vault holding the wand, then cut back to Alex who, in his flame-girt mirror, is viewing something he had never witnessed before—the takeoff of a jet plane.

The airplane climbs into the air and heads for the border between the two realms. Alex quickly realizes that this is the beginning of the raid, and he commences a spell. A dragon emerges from a cloudbank and flaps its way upward. It is tumbled about as the plane shoots by at an enormously superior speed and crosses the mountains high above Morningstar—who watches impassively. Alex then conjures up a storm which rages about the plane. It weathers this for a time but is finally struck by lightning. A wing breaks and falls off. The other wing then drops away very neatly, however, as does the tail assembly. The fuselage plummets, changing shape as it falls. A final lightning bolt misses it. When it appears that it must crash, a series of parachutes suddenly bloom above the remnant, now transformed into an armored vehicle.

Dropping the chutes, the vehicle advances. The storm continues. Alex works another spell. Soon the earth begins to tremble, and cracks appear within it. Flames leap from these; rocks are blasted into the air, some of them striking the advancing vehicle. Lightnings still flash nearby. Finally it is struck and shattered. A side collapses, becoming a ramp. A small, sportscar-type vehicle emerges and speeds on. Alex abandons his mirror and rushes to the wall. From there he can now view the thing unaided.

He leans forward and unleashes bolts of sorcerous energy directly from his hands. They fall upon the car ,and it begins to melt. Moments later, though, a motorcycle is jumped clear of the wreckage, ridden by a metallic figure—a robot or a person wearing body armor. For some time the rider dodges the bolts he hurls, all the while approaching nearer and nearer to the walls of the Keep.

Finally, he opens the earth before it. The rider leaps clear as the cycle plunges into the fiery abyss, landing on the far side of the burning pit and rushing afoot to the gates of the Keep. The armor is mechanized and full of weapons. Laser beams emerge from the hands, burning an opening through the gate.

Alex rushes to meet the invader, who is now upon the stair. Sorcerous bolts from his hands cancel laser beams from the other's as they move toward a confrontation before the crypt where the machine is kept. He burns out the other's armor but temporarily spends his own powers in so doing. The other turns and crashes through the door to the crypt.

Within, the machine rests on a pedestal. The invader rushes to it and begins operating the keyboard. Alex tackles the other, who crashes to the floor, helmet rolling away, much-abused armor coming unfastened. It is, of course, the girl he had seen earlier, stunned for a moment. The machine begins making strange sounds.

Cut to Jack, clutching the wand, racing up stairs to the top floor of the building, pursuit hot on his heels. He reaches the top and enters a room, slamming the door behind him and securing it. He turns then and sees that he is trapped. There are no other doors. All of the windows are barred. There comes a banging on the door. He rushes to the window and peers out.

The dawn is breaking. Atop the highest peak of the mountain range to the west, the statue of Morningstar has changed position. Arms and pinions raised high, its shadow flows again as the sun comes up, sliding across the building and finally the window out of which Jack stares. Smiling, Jack changes shape and oozes through the bars just as the door gives way. Again, the magical escalator ride along the shadow, across the plains, and through the mountains to Morningstar's prominence. There Jack collapses, the wand still clutched tightly in his hand.

Meanwhile, back at the Keep, the conflict between Alex and the girl has ended as the machine—which she had programmed—levitates and flies out the door. Alex rushes to the battlements, hurling sorcerous bolts after it, but it is fast and it is also able to parry them. It streaks westward.

Morningstar holds the wand in one hand and talks with Jack. Suddenly he reaches high into the air and closes his hand without turning his head to regard what he is doing, without halting his speech. When he lowers his hand, he holds the machine clasped within it.

Alex—with the girl (Dyjah) beside him, their struggle now forgotten—resorts to the mirror to trace the machine. He sees what has become of it—also of the wand. Morningstar somehow becomes aware of this scrutiny. He regards them from the mirror then draws them to him through it.

In their presence—and Jack's—Morningstar then states that it is time the two devices were returned to their respective realms and the world united in a special way. He does something to the wand and releases it. It rises above him, growing brighter and brighter, becoming starlike in appearance and sinking out of sight behind him in the west. Then he programs the small machine and releases it. It does the same thing, sinking in the east. The price of this union will be a single, stationary world, he explains, with a dark side and a light side, a realm of magic and a realm of science, coexistent, coterminous. Changes will occur, deep beneath the earth and high in the atmosphere: a magical screen emanating from the wand will protect the darkside from freezing; force fields, controlled by the machine, will keep the dayside from frying; between the two there will be a shadowland…

The world brakes slowly as the merger occurs. Numerous disasters ensue, but the two devices operate to prevent total chaos. A new order dawns. Alex and Dyjah regard each other with something like dawning realization of kinship. Jack allows that the new state of affairs may have been well worth his efforts, as it will provide a whole new area in which to practice his trade; and as for a land of permanent darkness—that's fine for a thief, too. He fades away into the gloom. Alex and Dyjah, now holding hands, turn away and begin to descend the mountainside.

Now, in a seeming eternal shadow, Morningstar still faces east, to await the impossible dawn…

A Word from Zelazny

This tale features the return of Jack of Shadows and Morningstar in a prequel to both "Shadowjack" and *Jack of Shadows*. Zelazny originally wrote it on commission as an animated film treatment. In the 1980s he wrote to an interested comics producer, "The only clear, unpublished property I have on hand at the moment is an outline for *Shadowland*, a prequel to my novel *Jack of Shadows*, originally intended for an animated film which never got made."[1] This may have been the second film outline (after *Changeling)* that he wrote for Nelvana Films in Toronto. He also wrote and sold an outline for an animated film incorporating American Indian mythology.[2]

The outline for *Shadowland* was again put into pre-production. Correspondence from 1993 through mid-1994 in the Zelazny archives at Syracuse University shows that Aries Graphics produced a rough script breakdown (based on this outline) and preliminary graphics for the 3-part graphic novel *Roger Zelazny's Shadowland*. The company apparently ceased operations before completing the project. The preceding is Zelazny's outline of the complete tale.

Zelazny wrote this piece and "Shadowjack" as prequels because he didn't want a sequel to *Jack of Shadows*. "I didn't really intend to continue that one. I liked ending it with that sort of ambiguous ending."[3]

Notes

Pinions are the primary feathers on a bird's wing. **Coterminous** means sharing a common boundary.

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[1] Undated letter from Roger Zelazny to Chris Ulm, *Eternity Comics*, Newbury Park, CA.

[2] *Science Fiction Chronicle #36* Vol 9 No 3, August 1980.

[3] *Media Sight* Vol 3 No 1, Summer 1984.

DYSONIZED BIOLOGICALS
(OUTLINE)

Written circa 1993; previously unpublished.

1) Val Sonjin (?) [John Adkin in the first draft] is shown in a bizarre virt environment, from which he is finally extricated to find himself in a human body in the massive caves which house the download facility ("mind-hive") from which he has apparently been extricated.

2) The robots which have been guarding this apparent final remnant of humanity tell him that they have brought him out of the hive and established him in one of the few functional, abandoned human bodies which had been preserved, explaining that their caretaker job has been expanded on receipt of a distress signal from a place called Reefworld in the asteroid belt. If there are humans out there, they must be protected, too, and a human is needed to pilot a human interface snail-ship to the apparently endangered settlement.

(The Reefworld's orbit was perturbed by a passing massive object falling sunward from the Oort Cloud. Now, in a few generations, Reefworld will also be toppling sunward. The Reefworlders had given up ages ago on trying to reach hypothetical survivors of the Age of Sunstorms—but now a broad-band SOS is their only hope.)

3) The robots also explain to Val that they have another need for his services. (Their *real* reason for wanting him.) They wish to arrest the deterioration of the Earth by having him, an engineer, employ existing equipment to produce an insulation belt about the dying Earth, to prolong the hive's existence.

4) There is another surviving human society, located on the moon. They devolved voluntarily, electing to pursue the ways of the mind, developing complex and profound psi powers.

Avilyn Murn is one such—a powerful telepath, a member of the Caste of Watchers, aware of the Reefworlders and even the Oorters in their spaghetti-like space caverns beyond the System's rim. In her constant scanning, she becomes aware that there is suddenly a human awareness on Earth beyond the background buzz of the hive.

5) She also becomes aware of Val's synthetic nature, knowing that he is not a real man but an artificial being, assembled of pieces and remains from the hive's memory bank solely to perform the insulation work mentioned above. His mind is a layered jumble which she feels is in danger of coming apart on the trip to Reefworld—the robots have never appreciated the true complexity of the human mind, having cast humanity in their own image.

So she reaches out to him telepathically, stating a desire to accompany him to Reefworld as his communications officer. Actually, as his headache medicine, using her psi powers to ease the still-developing synthesis of those layers that are his mind.

6) A funny thing happens to them on the way to Reefworld, leading a pod of whale tugs. Val becomes aware of the altered nature of the solar system and hears the story from Avilyn: The outer planets—Pluto, Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, and Jupiter—are missing, having been rendered into massive accumulations of objects in outer orbits. Also out there are pieces of macromachinery, designed—but never used—for purposes of employing these raw materials in some sort of gigantic solar engineering project.

It becomes obvious to Val that the solar system is running down—the sun dimmer than memory seems to recall, the remaining planets more advanced in their evolution. The Sol System is dying. (This goes back to the Age of the Sunstorms, which wiped out most of humanity and wrecked the Dysonizing project that might have saved the System. Now it is almost too late…)

7) Contact with Reefworld is established. Reefworld is pushed back into an acceptable orbit. Chambered Nautilus (?).

8) The robots know that this is the last generation before the technological tipping point beyond which the solar system might not be saved by Dysonizing. They have or had access to the equipment but no one to operate it. The distress of the asteroid colony was a fluke, coming when it did, but an excellent ploy for creating Val and sending him on a rescue mission during which he can be educated concerning humanity's peril.

Val realizes now that he is the last being capable of activating the Dysonizing equipment. This is the tipping point. If it is not done now, it never will be done, and the path to entropy lies clear. The moon people no longer understand the technology; the Reefworlders lack understanding of the interface linkages; the Oorters have evolved into ethnocentric claustrophobes.

To do this, he must sacrifice himself, peeling away his identity layer by layer and leaving each as the operating system for one of the giant pieces of equipment. Regretfully, he does this with Avilyn's assistance, hoping that when he has given his all, there might still be some small core of humanity remaining from which he might build a new, true self.

This proves to be the case, and the giant project is set in motion. But on his return to Earth he realizes that the Earth itself can be restored rather than merely insulated—as a new, organic-mechanico synthesis—saving the current hive of humanity as a functioning, if radically altered, entity if he will sacrifice the last of himself to empower and instruct existing systems. He elects to do this, bidding good-bye to those few things he has but recently learned to love.

Yet the pieces of his consciousness are somehow joined in a kind of immanent consciousness/presence on Earth and with the project, giving a kind of mystical view of the whole system as it is rejuvenated along new lines.

Notes

There are two known versions of this outline; the first, handwritten manuscript is entitled "D. B."; the second, typed revision lacks a title. The handwritten version says, "but the Dysonized Biological equipment needs a mental link of some sort," so "D. B." is probably "Dysonized Biologicals." Zelazny changed the protagonist's name from John Adkin to Val Sonjin between drafts with a (?) indicating that both names were tentative. Zelazny probably wrote this outline in 1993; it resides among handwritten drafts of *Donnerjack* dated 1993 and a biography of Fred Saberhagen Zelazny wrote for Philcon 93. This volume's version incorporates some material left out of the typed revision.

Dysonized refers to Freeman Dyson, the English-born American physicist and mathematician who theorized about space colonies, space travel and extraterrestrial life. He proposed that intelligent species would be found occupying an artificial biosphere that completely surrounds its parent star (a Dyson Sphere). **Virt** means virtual reality. The **Oort Cloud** is a cluster of matter orbiting the sun out to about a light year's distance, proposed as the source of comets that approach the sun.

Some words are reasonable guesses from the handwritten manuscript, but we were particularly unsure of the words in brackets.

DONNERJACK, OF VIRTÙ:

A FABLE FOR THE MACHINE AGE (OUTLINE)

Written in September 1991; previously unpublished.

Background: Mid to late 21st century, a world featuring a global computer network, easy organ transplants, genetic engineering, in-system space travel, space habitats, lunar cities, a Mars base. Standard expected model for general stuff.

Getting more specific, let us zero in on that computer network. This is going to be a non-cyberpunk story in which that network will provide considerable environment. Yes, there is this world computer network with access to everything—national library, public records, World [shared]-type data in realtime. Enormous computer capacity, both analog and digital, lots of VR. Various [channels] and encrypted databases possess special areas of access, of course, as now, and entertainment within its precincts is a pay-as-you-go matter, Electronic Cash changing accounts at the instant of command.

Much of the entertainment, as well as a good deal of the business, is conducted in Virtual Reality (VR) spaces, extensions of the sort discussed in the latter sections of Howard Reingold's recent book *Virtual Reality* (Simon & Schuster Summit Book, 1991) where full sensory feedback from a computer construct can substitute this artificial reality for the consensus domestic variety. (*i.e.*, one might go bowling on virtual lanes, attend services in a virtual church, get laid in a virtual whorehouse, etc.) None of this is achieved by a cerebral "jacking-in" process, hooking up a human nervous system with the network by means of physical implants in the human body. No. This is all done directly with the senses, with hologrammatic representation and laser forcefield pressure inductions. Recreational parlors of this sort are as common as theaters are now, and the wealthy may have such setups in their own homes. This is considered 2nd stage (exogenous) interaction with the systems (first stage being simple hybrid or visual control and appropriate terminal response, normally on a screen). These are often mediated by special unit AIs of varying degrees of sophistication.

Endogenous interactions are of the sort involving linkage between network and nervous system (3rd stage), but by means of induction fields rather than mechanical coupling. These results are normally highly [informatic] and are meant for more technical operations, as opposed to teleconferencing and recording at the 2nd stage. Theoretically, a [person's] 3rd stage interactions could be used to produce 2nd stage effects. But why bother when 2nd stage is itself so much easier to employ?

While the network is full of AIs of varying [complexity], performing [many] functions, hardly anyone realizes what all else it has accumulated over the centuries-plus that the network has been in existence—let alone that entropy and evolution are occurring within it in very special ways.

Drifting also in the network are all sorts of rogue AIs (Aions) who've created renegade programs, intelligences who've gone over the hill, and intelligences created by other "free" AIs and (it's been said) even some who've evolved deep within the system. There are many layers of complexity to the network. The lowest, to use a spatial metaphor, is Dark Fields, the place in which all crashed programs, discarded data, broken Aions, finally come to rest. All of the system's discards wind up in this plane of entropy. Those which do not come to it easily are gathered by its resident master, an Aion best known as Death. Death collects the dead. Apart from this, Death's only pleasure seems to be music—a hard thing to come by in the Dark Fields, place of discord and of silence.

Other intelligences have evolved (and perhaps [external tunneling] by virtue of their access to all recorded knowledge of history, religion, and mythology) within the broad [residential] bands—both licit and underground—of the VR arena where Real Time (RT) humans take their vacations. These have developed great similarities (and powers) similar to those of the native gods of all the great mythologies. Nymph and satyr figures in pleasure areas. Bacchus and Dionysus [figures], too (and the [Furies] in those dark places where [pleasure] and [madness] are close to each other). Ahriman-like figure in the higher [realms] of [catechism]. And an analog from out of human history (and pre-history) lives somewhere within the rest, if one could but find the way.

I don't think we'll call it the Network, though. We'll call it Virtù—both in reference to Virtual Reality and in the 18th century scene it suggests, of art, curios, artifacts—since it will replicate the greatest artifacts the human race has created.

And who is Donnerjack (John D'Arcy Donnerjack, Jr. to be precise)?

* * *

In a world such as we've just described, people can work out of their homes, conferring in the net, meeting in VR (thus giving themselves whatever appearance they choose). Virtual universities—campuses as well as classrooms, if it's Ivy League or otherwise expensive—can exist in VR. John D'Arcy Donnerjack, Sr., was a famous academic there with some nutty ideas, inventing rogue intelligences within the system, etc. But he was also a much sought-after consultant in matters of VR architecture—perhaps best known as the man who'd constructed a virtual representation of Dante's *Inferno*.

Obsessed with his near-occult ideas of hidden intelligences within Virtù, he has retired with his wife Sarah to a castle in Scotland—a rundown property which had been in the family for years. He proceeded to renovate the place, laying miles and miles of fiber optic cable as well as erecting powerful antennas, to turn it into a somewhat comfortable—if forbidding—home workplace staffed by robots, with massive VR potential. Thus he made his living as a consultant and devoted most of his time to research. And time with his wife Sarah. No one he finds, it turns out later, knows her. Where'd she come from? There seems to be no record of her birth.

He finds evidence of the background material I discussed—not yet common knowledge—within Virtù. And more. After a year or so his son is born there—Sarah, alas, dying in childbirth. He holds himself responsible (perhaps rightly) for her death, for relying on robot midwifery rather than taking her to a hospital, and he goes ever down to psychosis, giving his son into the care of the robots and devoting every waking hour to his work.

One day he is found slumped over a computer terminal, quite dead. Had he learned too much? Was he done in by an Aion? Whatever, he is buried by the robots in the family plot, next to a grave marked "Sarah" and the robots, under the command of a [strange] Aion instruction to care for John D'Arcy Donnerjack, Jr.

The old man's death is not reported to the authorities. His virtual image still teleconferences. His consultant work goes on in his home. He is paid by means of EFT; his taxes are paid in the same manner. Food is delivered by helicopters every month or so, delivery taken by the robots, payment made by EFT.

Most of the boy's time is spent in VR. When he "escapes" he's either lurking about a spooky castle (complete with RT ghosts to keep the complaints rolling) or in the company of Aion-controlled robots.

Okay. His upbringing is a 21st century equivalent of Tarzan's—Virtù instead of the jungle, Aions instead of apes and other creatures. Parable for the machine age—this is the closest the century can manage to Rousseau's natural man.

❖ ❖ ❖

Is young Donnerjack somehow the result of a mating between a human male and a virtual woman? If so, how? It is true that the entire human genetic code has been sequenced, but how could its virtual representation serve for fertilization? Whatever—for now—is this the key to the ability he develops, while hanging out with Aions in Virtù? He finds out that he can pass physically through the interface RT and VR, manifesting anywhere within the network, traveling its strange unimaginable realms, merging with 3rd stage forms when the desire arises. For he does these things into young manhood, never during all this time setting eyes on a real human; he only knows their "ghosts" whenever they visit VR.

❖ ❖ ❖

Plots: a virtual religion has just recently arisen, certain pleasure parlors serving as gateways to places of worship of the gods of Virtù. It is treated by the media as just another on-line cult, its deities associated to RT gentilities. One proceeds through a flame-like field, reclines in an aesculaparian, rises and makes one's way through Elysian fields to the sites of the services where the visitors simply recline. (Physically, in RT, it could be a dormitory, its true functions masked by VR constructs and their subsequent sensations VR-mediated.)

And a strange new disease has also arisen with a variety of symptoms, some of these hallucinatory, including psychotic episodes, others involving high blood pressure, syncope, cardiac arrhythmias, death by ventricular fibrillation or massive heart failure. Dr. Lydia Hazzard, a pathologist of the CDC, has been assigned to investigate this. She knows that, oddly, many of the victims are reported to fall into the category of "mud eaters," people who for no apparent reason indulge an appetite for clay.

* * *

Death discovers someone rummaging in Dark Fields, making off with strange bits and pieces which had come to rest there. It's an interesting place, with ways of converting visitors into clientele. Brave individuals, whoever/whatever they were. Death studies the area a long while, then begins his own gathering, assembling the pieces into something rare and strange.

* * *

A short, stereotypical detective, Dale Drum, shot in the course of an investigation, listed as DOA at a S.F. non-public hospital, recovers suddenly, strange gaps in his memories, odd additions. He'd been investigating the Net gods religion and had attended a type of secret ceremony with some others. His client is Istara Valdes, owner of the busiest brothel in San Francisco, and ostensibly concerned that orgiastic rites might detract from her business.

He meets the CDC doctor, Lydia, on the way to autopsy one of her own case studies. (She's a friend of Mary Drake, the doctor attending his case.) He continues then talking about the reason Lydia's alone. Tells her that he might be able to help with her investigation if she'll help with his. He makes a date with her and slips away, anxious to avoid the police investigating his murder.

She was planning to see her daughter Cath that eve, and her daughter's reporter boyfriend (of whom she doesn't approve). He works for a sort of *Rolling Stone*-type mag. Later, in a lounge, she chides Drum for having left the hospital against medical advice, though he seems in fine shape now. She tells him about her investigation and the bit about the clay-eating. He admits to having picked up the habit himself, several months earlier, and he'd since become aware of its prevalence among Netgod worshippers. She is intrigued by this and wants to attend a service with him. This is done, and an attempt (in VR) is made on their lives. Donnerjack, who's been watching the development of this cult with some curiosity, revives them, though they must flee along separate routes though VR, having various harrowing and provocative experiences along their ways. Donnerjack finds himself drawn to ________ (the daughter)

All safely recovered and returned to RT (save for Donnerjack) the pursuit continues in what has been thought to be the safety of RT. Other things are learned, also. A very thorough autopsy reveals the presence of what might be a small, strange chip in the vicinity of the SA node of the heart in one of the victims of the parlor disease. Other corpses revealed a similar feature of such an excrescence, oddly positioned at an anterior point which generates an electrical impulse? It is not recognized as a chip, though—only a strange silicon tumor.

Donnerjack, hastens, suddenly lonely, talking to ghosts, realizes he wants to see ______ again, and decides for the first time to go looking for somebody in RT. Later, in the company of Lydia, he realizes that the thing is a chip, and they attempt to analyze its functions.

It is, it turns out, grown from a VR matrix of a gene-tailored virus installed in selected worshippers, on piercing through the farm-like families. Completing its growth perfectly, it will permit the gods of Virtù to take broadest control of these RT bodies temporarily or permanently, thus manifesting in a realm hitherto beyond their reach—"returning," as they consider it, to the world from which they had been exiled, in terms of their own mythology.

Other characters get involved: Lydia's boss, Dr. Morris Marten, a government investigator, George Carroll, an old colleague of Prof. Donnerjack, Dr. Samuel Ellerby, and a preacher irked at the new religion—Axel Satus.

The chase/investigation goes on in RT. Revolutions ensue. Heavy action in Virtù, also.

A Word from Zelazny

Zelazny wasn't pleased with how contemporary cyberpunk novels like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and its many imitators treated virtual reality. He planned to rework the concept in the "non-cyberpunk" *Donnerjack* trilogy. Author William Sanders said, "Roger Zelazny often spoke of the need to rescue the virtual reality concept from the rather scabby literary neighborhood it had come to inhabit. VR, he would say, was (at least potentially) the most wonderful of all human creations; it ought to be more than just a technological background for stories about alienated youth versus vicious megacorporations."[1] Unfortunately, only hints remain of Zelazny's vision for the trilogy.

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[1] Sanders, William. *New York Review of Science Fiction #116*, 1998, pp. 11-12.

Notes

Dated 9/20/91, this handwritten manuscript in the Syracuse University Archives is Zelazny's original outline for his trilogy (*Donnerjack, of Virtù; The Gods of Virtù; and Virtù, Virtù*). He started *Donnerjack, of Virtù* the following year, completing about a third before his death. *Psychoshop* and *Lord Demon* distracted him from working continuously on *Donnerjack*. Jane Lindskold completed it and published it as *Donnerjack*; its storyline encompassed the trilogy's scope.

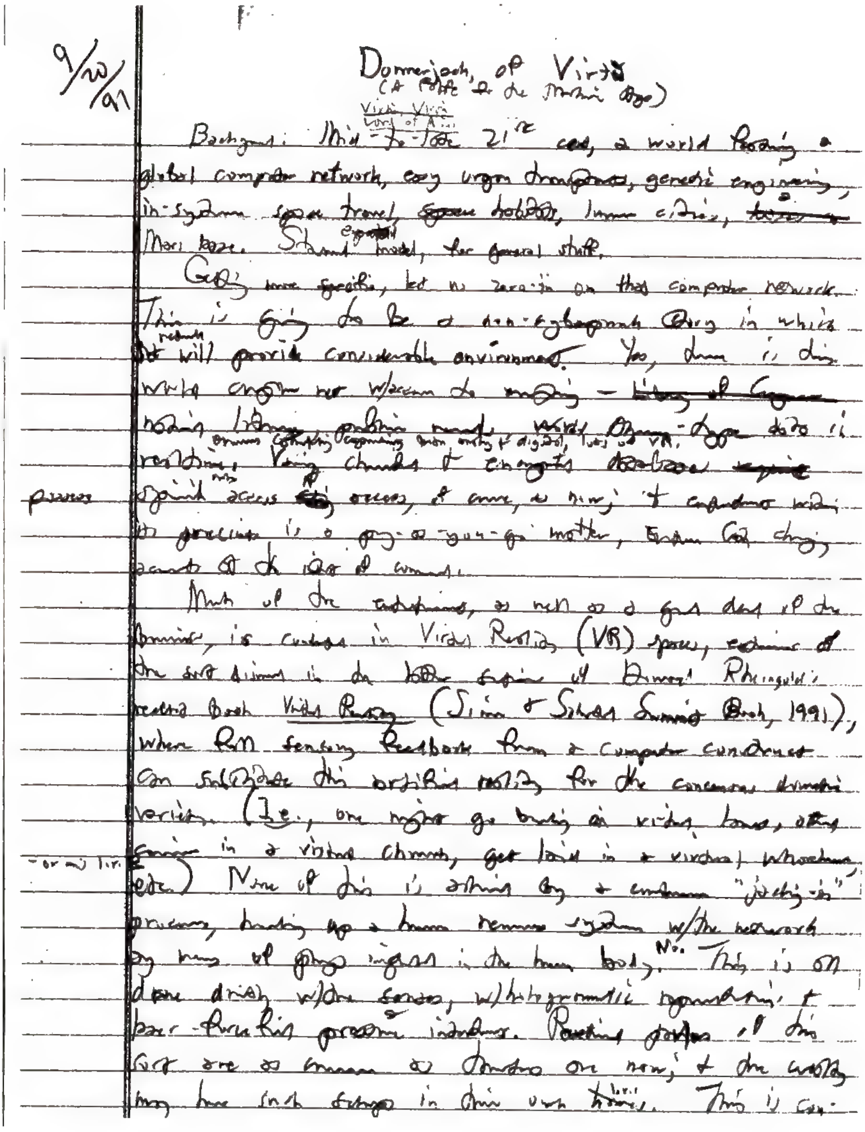
This rough outline lacks the polished language of a typical Zelazny story, and his illegible handwriting makes it impossible to determine the exact word he intended in every case. This treatment is included here to demonstrate his original vision of the trilogy and how it differs from the final novel.

The blank underscore comes from the manuscript, indicating that Zelazny had not yet determined a final name for Dr. Lydia Hazzard's daughter.

Nymphs are nature spirits, beautiful maidens inhabiting rivers, woods, or other locations; it also means a beautiful young woman. **Satyrs** are lustful, drunken woodland gods resembling men with a goat's or horse's ears, hind limbs and tails. **Bacchus** and **Dionysus** are names for the wine god, who loosens inhibitions and inspires musical and poetic creativity. **Ahriman** or Angra Mainyu is the spirit of darkness, chief adversary of supreme deity Ahura Mazda in the Iranian religion Zoroastrianism. Ahriman features prominently in the outline "The Ahriman Factor" that became the collaborative novel *The Mask of Loki*. **Dante's *Inferno*** is the first book of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*; it describes Dante's descent through the nine circles of Hell.

EFT means electronic funds transfer. **Tarzan** was created by Edgar Rice Burroughs in part to demonstrate the effect that environment (growing up in a jungle uncorrupted by human influence) can have on a man's character. The concept mirrored philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's vision of the **natural man** or Noble Savage: A man uncorrupted by civilization was nobler than his "civilized" contemporaries. Would John D'Arcy Donnerjack, Junior, uncorrupted by the real world, have a more moral character?

Aesculapius is the Roman god of medicine and healing; **aesculapian** means physician. Zelazny's neologism **aesculaparian** seems to imply a medical bed within virtual reality, similar to beds in sickbay on the starship *Enterprise*. In classical mythology, the **Elysian Fields** is where the blessed go after death. **Mud eating** and eating other non-food substances (chalk, clay, dried paint, ice, etc.) is pica; it can occur with mental illness, malnutrition, and pregnancy. **DOA** means Dead on Arrival. The **SA node** or sinoatrial node is the heart's pacemaker, a specialized muscle area that undergoes timed electrical depolarizations.



9/20/91

Donnerjack, of Virtù
(A Fable for the Machine Age)
Virtù, Virtù
Lord of A...

Background: Mid-to-late 21st cent., a world having a global computer network, easy organ transplants, genetic engineering, in-system space travel, ~~space~~ habitats, lunar cities, ~~[illegible]~~ Mars base. Standard expanded model, for general stuff.

Getting more specific, let us zero-in on that computer network. This is going to be a non-cyberpunk story in which network will provide considerable environment. Yes, there is this world enough [illegible] to [illegible] — ~~Library of Congress~~ holdings, library, public records, World Almanac-type data is realtime; browsers, Computing, Cataloguing, then entry & digitized, lots of VR. Voting, churches & emergency databases ~~[illegible]~~ against access ~~[illegible]~~ access, & [illegible], [illegible] & expanding [illegible] its precision is a pay-as-you-go matter, [illegible] charges against the idea of commons.

passwords

Much of the entertaining, as well as a good deal of the business, is conducted in Virtual Reality (VR) space, extension of the sort discussed in the latter chapters of Howard Rheingold's recent book Virtual Reality (Simon & Schuster Summit Books, 1991), where full sensory feedback from a computer construct can substitute this artificial reality for the consensus dramatic version. (I.e., one might go boating in virtual lands, attend services in a virtual church, get lost in a virtual whorehouse, etc.) None of this is achieved by a cumbersome "jacking-in" process, hooking up a human nervous system w/the network by means of plugs inserted in the human body. No. This is all done directly w/the senses, w/holographic reproductions & bone-conducting pressure induction. [illegible] portions of this sort are as common as [illegible] are now; & the wealthy may have such setups in their own homes. This is con-

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This is the first page of the original handwritten outline for *Donnerjack of Virtù*. It may serve to explain the uncertainty about certain words and the occasional confusing sentence.

From the *Roger Zelazny Papers; Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.*

A ZELAZNY TIMELINE

Born May 13 in Euclid, Ohio	1937	
Attends Noble School in Euclid	1943	
	1949	
Attends Shore Junior High		Writes Zlaz/Yok stories for *The Record*
	1952	
Attends Euclid Senior High	1953	
Takes creative writing classes		Writes dozens of stories but fails to sell any
		Co-edits fanzine *Thurban I*
		"Conditional Benefit, Part 1" published in August/September
	1954	*Eucuyo* (Senior High literary annual) publishes two stories and one poem in Spring
Editor-in-Chief of school newspaper *The Survey* (senior year)		First professional story payment in October—*Literary Cavalcade* publishes "Mr. Fuller's Revolt"
	1955	*Eucuyo* publishes another story and poem in Spring

	1955	
Attends Western Reserve University in Cleveland		
	1956	
Majors in psychology		
Begins to learn fencing	**1957**	Finley Foster Poetry Prize for "Southern Cross"
Switches to English major in junior year		
Begins life-long study of judo, karate, and other martial arts	**1958**	**"The Outward Sign" and "Man Without a Shadow" published in April in *Skyline***
Captains épée squad in senior year	**1959**	Finley Foster Poetry Prize for "Decade Plus One of Roses"
Graduates with BA in English		
		"Decade Plus One of Roses" and "Tryptych" published in April in *Skyline*
Graduate course work at Columbia University in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama		
	1960	Frequents Greenwich Village scene; meets and later becomes engaged to folksinger Hedy West
Master's thesis rejected		*Chisel in the Sky* poetry manuscript doesn't win Yale Younger Poets Prize (abandons poetry for prose)
Joins Ohio National Guard—six month tour of duty in Texas		
	1961	
		Engagement to Hedy West broken off
Revised Master's thesis accepted in fall		Writes "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" in October but shelves it
Employment with Social Security Administration in Cleveland in February	**1962**	Writes short stories during evenings and weekends
Graduates from Columbia with MA in English and Comparative Literature in May		**Sells "Passion Play" in March, published in August's *Amazing***
		Sends "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" to *F&SF*

1963

Writes “The Doors of His Face,
the Lamps of His Mouth,”
“The Furies,” and
“The Graveyard Heart”

16 stories published this year,
including “A Rose for Ecclesiastes”
in November *F&SF*

1964

Writes “He Who Shapes”

First Hugo nomination for
“A Rose for Ecclesiastes”

“The Graveyard Heart” published in
March

Engaged to Sharon Steberl

Serious motor vehicle accident on
September 27—Steberl hospitalized
six weeks, marriage postponed

Finishes first novel
...And Call Me Conrad
[aka *This Immortal*]

Father (Joseph) dies unexpectedly
on November 25—writes a trio of
stories in one day (“Divine Madness,”
“Comes Now the Power,”
and “But Not the Herald”)

Marries Steberl on December 5

1965

“He Who Shapes” published in
January/February

Deals with rapidly
deteriorating marriage

“The Doors of His Face, the Lamps
of His Mouth” published in March

Conceives *Lord of Light* in May and
devotes a year to writing it

Separates from Steberl in the summer
and moves to Baltimore

“The Furies” published in June

Writes *The Dream Master*,
“For a Breath I Tarry,”
“This Moment of the Storm,” and
“The Keys to December”

Wins two Nebulas ("He Who Shapes" and "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"); Nebula finalist ("Devil Car") Divorces Sharon Steberl on June 27 Marries Judith Alene Callahan on August 20 Wins Hugo for ...*And Call Me Conrad*; Hugo finalist ("The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth")	**1966**	"For a Breath I Tarry" published in March Finishes writing *Lord of Light* in March Begins writing *Creatures of Light and Darkness* "This Moment of the Storm" published in June First novel *This Immortal* published in July "The Keys to December" published in August *The Dream Master* published in October
Nebula finalist ("This Moment of the Storm") Nova Award in June Elected Secretary-Treasurer of SFWA in June Selected to edit *Nebula Award Stories Three* in July Hugo finalists ("For a Breath I Tarry," "This Moment of the Storm," and "Comes Now the Power")	**1967**	Finishes *Nine Princes in Amber* in first week of February but shelves it Writes part of *The Guns of Avalon* Writes "Damnation Alley" Finishes *Creatures of Light and Darkness* but shelves it *Four for Tomorrow* [collection] published in March *Lord of Light* published in August
Nebula finalists (*Lord of Light*, "This Mortal Mountain," "The Keys to December") Begins collaborating with Philip K. Dick on *Deus Irae* in the spring Resigns as Secretary-Treasurer of SFWA in June Hugo Award for *Lord of Light* Hugo finalist ("Damnation Alley")	**1968**	Writes *Isle of the Dead* and *Damnation Alley* Samuel R. Delany brings *Creatures of Light and Darkness* (in April) and *Nine Princes in Amber* (in July) to the attention of Doubleday Editor Marc Haefele Abandons *The Guns of Avalon* in September *Nebula Award Stories Three* [anthology] published in November

	1969	*Isle of the Dead* published in January
Resigns job May 1 to write full-time		
Writes *To Die in Italbar* in May, Doubleday declines to publish it		
Writes first tale of nameless detective, "The Eve of RUMOKO"		*Creatures of Light and Darkness* published in July
Writes "Come to Me Not in Winter's White" with Harlan Ellison		
Intermittent work on *Deus Irae*		*Damnation Alley* published in October
Finishes *Jack of Shadows* in December		
	1970	
Nebula finalist (*Isle of the Dead*)		*Nine Princes in Amber* published in April
Begins writing *Today We Choose Faces* and *Apostate's Gold* (aka *The Dead Man's Brother*)		
Resumes writing *The Guns of Avalon*		
	1971	
Intermittent work on *Deus Irae*		
Finishes *The Dead Man's Brother* in June		*The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth and Other Stories* [collection] published in May
Finishes *The Guns of Avalon* in November		*Jack of Shadows* published in August
Son Devin Joseph born December 26		
	1972	
Finishes *Today We Choose Faces* in March		
Completes revisions of *To Die in Italbar*, adding Francis Sandow, in May		
Writes "'Kjwalll'kje'k'koothaïlll'kje'k," in June		
Begins writing *Doorways in the Sand*		*The Guns of Avalon* published in August
Intermittent work on *Deus Irae*		
Wins Prix Apollo for *Isle of the Dead*		
Hugo finalist (*Jack of Shadows*)		

Writes "The Engine at Heartspring's Center"	**1973**	
		***Today We Choose Faces* published in April**
Intermittent work on *Deus Irae*		***To Die in Italbar* published in May**
Finishes *Doorways in the Sand* on May 24		
Begins *Sign of the Unicorn*		
The Dead Man's Brother shelved after multiple rejections in May		
	1974	
		Finishes *Sign of the Unicorn* in June
Worldcon Guest of Honor at Discon II		Writes "Home Is the Hangman"
		***Poems* [poetry] published in September**
Moves to Santa Fe, NM in January	**1975**	***Sign of the Unicorn* published in February**
Nebula and Jupiter finalist ("The Engine at Heartspring's Center")		Finishes *Deus Irae* in the spring
		Writes *The Hand of Oberon* (finished by fall) and *Bridge of Ashes*
	1976	
Works on *Roadmarks* and *The Courts of Chaos*		***Doorways in the Sand* published in March**
Work begins on *The Illustrated Roger Zelazny*		***The Hand of Oberon* and *My Name Is Legion* [collection] published in April**
Nebula Award for "Home Is the Hangman" Nebula finalist (*Doorways in the Sand*)		
American Library Association names *Doorways in the Sand* one of the Best Books for Young Adults		***Bridge of Ashes*, and *Deus Irae* published in July**
Seuin Award for *This Immortal*		
Hugo Award for "Home Is the Hangman" Hugo finalist (*Doorways in the Sand*)		
Son Jonathan Trent born November 28		

Finishes *The Courts of Chaos* Works on *Roadmarks*	**1977**	Movie *Damnation Alley* released October 21
Finishes *Roadmarks* Finishes "The Last Defender of Camelot" Guest of Honor at Eastercon in Melbourne, Australia	**1978**	*The Illustrated Roger Zelazny* [collection] published in February *The Courts of Chaos* published in August
Meets Ed Greenwood and spontaneously writes a portion of "A Secret of Amber" in March Conceives *A Night in the Lonesome October* in May Writes *Changeling* Early work on *Eye of Cat* Resurrects Dilvish with "A City Divided" Daughter Shannon Alene born September 1	**1979**	*The Chronicles of Amber volumes 1 and 2* [omnibus] published in January from SFBC *The Bells of Shoredan* [chapbook] published in May *Roadmarks* published in October
Writes *The Changing Land* (finished in March) and *Madwand* Writes "Unicorn Variation" during Alaskan cruise in late May/June Continues work on *Eye of Cat* Incorporates as The Amber Corporation on July 31 Balrog Award for "The Last Defender of Camelot"	**1980**	*When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed* [poetry] published in February *For a Breath I Tarry* and *The Last Defender of Camelot* [chapbook] published in May *Changeling* published in June *The Last Defender of Camelot* [collection] published in December
Summer-long visit to Ireland Writes *Coils* with Fred Saberhagen Writes three film treatments, one later becomes *Dreamscape*	**1981**	*The Changing Land* published in April *The Last Defender of Camelot* [limited edition] and *Madwand* [limited] published in July *A Rhapsody in Amber* [chapbook] published in September *To Spin Is Miracle Cat* [poetry] published in October

Finishes *Eye of Cat*	**1982**	*Coils* published in May
Hugo Award for "Unicorn Variation"		*Eye of Cat* published in October
		Dilvish, the Damned [collection] published in November
	1983	*Unicorn Variations* [collection] published in October
	1984	
Seuin Award for "Unicorn Variation"		Begins writing *Trumps of Doom*
Unicorn Variations wins Locus Award, Balrog Award, and Daicon Award		Writes "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"
	1985	Writes "Permafrost"
		Begins work on *Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway*
Judy Zelazny graduates in law from University of New Mexico		*Trumps of Doom* published in May
Finishes *Blood of Amber* in November		
	1986	Writes *Sign of Chaos* and *A Dark Traveling*
Nebula finalist ("24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai")		Contributes second portion of "A Secret of Amber"
Locus Award for *Trumps of Doom*		
Hugo Award for "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"		*Blood of Amber* published in September
	1987	
Interviewed for *Roger Zelazny's Visual Guide to Castle Amber*		*A Dark Traveling* published in April
Nebula finalist for "Permafrost"		*Sign of Chaos* published in September
Hugo Award for "Permafrost"		*Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway: Clypsis* published in October
	1988	
Gerald Hausman approaches Zelazny with concept of *Colterglass*		*Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway: Pitfall* published in February
Writes "Kalifriki of the Thread"		*Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway: The Web* published in June
		Roger Zelazny's Visual Guide to Castle Amber published in November

Collaborates with Thomas T. Thomas on *The Mask of Loki* Corresponds with Jane Lindskold and meets her at Lunacon Writes *Knight of Shadows* (finishes in March) Writes *The Black Throne* with Fred Saberhagen	1989	Agrees to collaborate with Gerald Hausman on *Colterglass* *Frost & Fire* [collection] published in July *Wizard World* [omnibus] published in October *Knight of Shadows* published in November
Jane Lindskold begins researching her biography *Roger Zelazny* in-person and via correspondence Begins writing *Colterglass* with chapter 2's "Glass"	1990	Writes *Prince of Chaos* Writes *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming* with Robert Sheckley *The Black Throne* published in October *The Mask of Loki* published in November
Writes *Flare* with Thomas T. Thomas Finishes *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming* Writes *If at Faust You Don't Succeed* with Robert Sheckley Works on *Colterglass* Writes "Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love" Unearths 1979 notes for *A Night in the Lonesome October* in December	1991	Conceives *Donnerjack* trilogy *The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth* [short story limited] published in September *Prince of Chaos* published in November *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming* and *Gone to Earth* [collection] published in December
Writes *A Farce to Be Reckoned With* with Robert Sheckley Begins *Donnerjack,* the first of a trilogy Writes third contribution to "A Secret of Amber" at Marcon 27	1992	Finishes *A Night in the Lonesome October* in March Finishes *Colterglass* (now *Wilderness)* *Here There Be Dragons, Way Up High, and Flare* published in September
Writes first Amber short story "The Salesman's Tale" in June Writes "Godson" Begins finishing Alfred Bester's manuscript *The Psycho Hockshop* Inkpot Award for Best Prose Writer (Comic-Con International)	1993	Solicits stories for *Wheel of Fortune* and *Warriors of Blood and Dream* *If at Faust You Don't Succeed* published in March *A Night in the Lonesome October* published in August

Diagnosed with inoperable colon cancer Begins chemotherapy Separates from wife Judy and moves in with Jane Lindskold in June	1994	*Wilderness* published in February Finishes *Psychoshop* Works on *Donnerjack* and *Lord Demon* Solicit stories for anthologies *Forever After* and *The Williamson Effect* Creates *Chronomaster* game with Jane Lindskold *And the Darkness Is Harsh* [chapbook] published in December
Discusses completion of *Donnerjack* and *Lord Demon* with Jane Lindskold Nebula finalist (*A Night in the Lonesome October*) Completes "Godson: A Play in Three Acts" Works on *Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation* Dies June 14 of renal failure	1995	*A Farce to Be Reckoned With* published in April
		Warriors of Blood and Dream [anthology] published in June *Forever After* [anthology] and *Wheel of Fortune* [anthology] published in December
The Williamson Effect [anthology] published in May Mother (Josephine) dies October 3	1996	*Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation* [poetry] published in February
	1997	*Donnerjack* [completed by Jane Lindskold] published September
Lord of the Fantastic [tribute anthology] published in May	1998	*Psychoshop* published in July
Lord Demon [completed by Jane Lindskold] published in August	1999	*The Great Book of Amber* [omnibus] published in December
The First Chronicles of Amber [omnibus] [SFBC] published in November	2002	*The Last Defender of Camelot* ["best-of" collection reuses earlier title] published in March
Manna From Heaven [collection] published in January	2003	*The Second Chronicles of Amber* [omnibus] [SFBC] published in March
The Dead Man's Brother published in February	2005	
Inducted into The Science Fiction Hall of Fame in June	2009 2010	*The Collected Stories of Roger Zelazny*, published in February (v1&2), June (v3&4), and December (v5&6)

Z-WORLD

by Michael Whelan

The first part of any illustration commission for me is the reading. As soon as David Grubbs began to send the stories to me, I started reading them through. Some of them I had read previously, but quite a few of the stories were new to me as well. *Lord of Light* has always been one of my favorite books, so I read that one again just to add to my sense of immersion in Roger's universes.

David had sent a list of elements summarizing themes and motifs in Roger's writings for me to consider. "A Word from Zelazny" and the Notes after each entry were very helpful as well.

The more I read, the more I became aware of how vast and all-encompassing Roger's writing is. Initially I felt overwhelmed by it all: there was simply too much to try to do a fair job of capturing it all. Upon reflection I settled on a blend of 1) managing elements of Roger Zelazny's stories that may apply to tales within a particular volume, and 2) adding things "on the fly", as a part of the process of doing the painting, using connections that popped up while adding details to the composition. I'd be less than honest to say it didn't occur to me that I could paint just about anything at random, knowing that a connection could be found between what I had depicted and some narrative or thematic element in one or more of Zelazny's writings.

That was liberating. I felt free to develop the composition from a "big design" standpoint since there was such a wealth of potential material to draw on to "populate" the image areas with.

The idea of running one image across the spines of the six books was part of David's plan for the series. Alice Lewis turned that into some proposed jacket designs using a stock image and presented the idea to me. Very early on, we discussed the idea among the three of us and planned how to put it together.

The challenge of trying to make it work seemed exciting to me, so I was drawn to that approach right away. Once the reading was complete, I began to experiment with different conceptual frameworks within which to place the elements, working very loosely on small panels in monochrome acrylic paints. Right away I decided that the composition would best be done on a diagonal, to negate the enforced verticality of the edges of the volumes. A series of angled columns would serve as elements cutting across those verticals as well as carrying the main design from one spine to the next. I liked the idea of columns and their suggestion of old classical cultures in desolation. I can't explain why it seemed fitting to me.

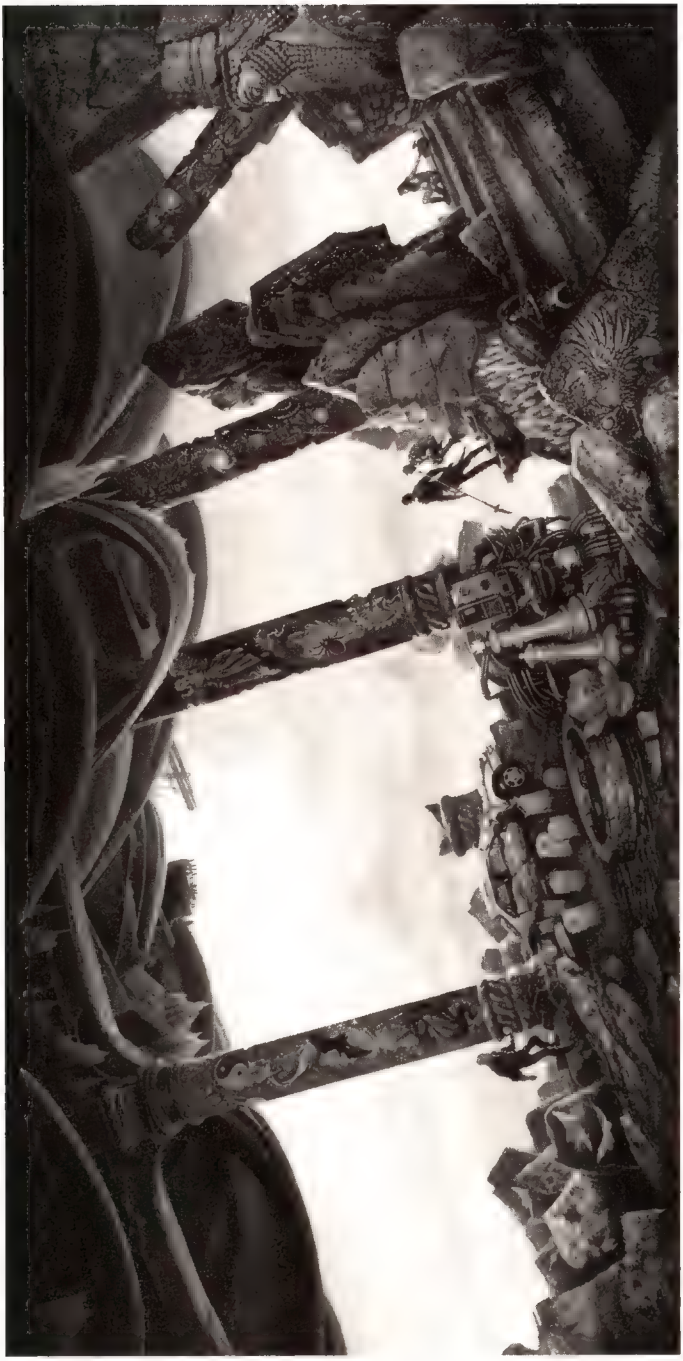
So once that provided the framework for me, I was ready to work with and around those shapes.

I made a compositional sketch with the edges of the different volumes marked off, trying my best to arrange the salient elements to work both on the spines and in the image as a whole. I felt the columns alone would be too linear so I added the curving shapes of the fabrics on top to provide a contrast for the type destined to go there and to give some relief from the linear repetition of the columns.

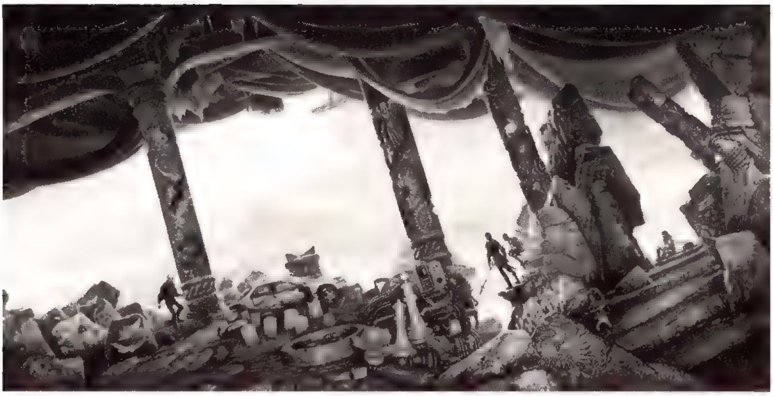
Some columns are intact but others are broken. An interrupted pattern, I thought, is more interesting than rigid regularity and conformity.

I usually work from background to foreground, and this painting was no exception. In spite of my best efforts to be methodical in my approach, however, there is always some back-and-forth when I adjust the relative contrast between the foreground and background. It usually involves some seesawing until the balance feels right.

I was too impatient to get going on the image to wait to have all the various elements ironed out in advance, so once I had the essential foreground/background areas defined, I went to work, trusting myself to find the shapes within the image as I worked on it. I was aiming more for a feel of the essence of Roger's stories rather than slavishly shoehorning a set number of pictorial pieces into the image.



Z-World by Michael Whelan, 2009, acrylics on watercolor board



THE FRAMEWORK

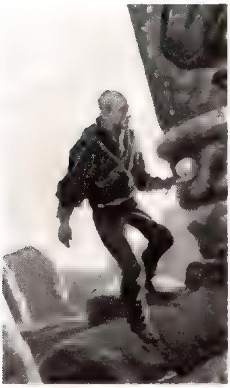
The fallen building, angled columns, broken landscape and post-apocalyptic feel were created to supply a framework in which to contain and support the other elements. The specific items gave me a sense of antiquity and lost empire, set on a foundation of nature, and this was a subjective reflection of Roger's writing to a certain degree…though I can't point to a specific narrative. Rocks, of course, can be found directly in "Collector's Fever," but that's incidental.

The framework might also be thought of as Zelazny's subconscious… a landscape of Byzantine/Greek architecture and other mythic elements, filled with images from all corners of his imagination—I did title the painting "Z-World".

The diagonals, an obvious feature of the painting, were purely a design consideration, though the feeling of "disorientation" does feature prominently in some of Roger's stories, and so can be seen as a contributing factor. Roger had an interesting way of looking at things and one could point to the skewed horizon line as a reflection of this, metaphorically speaking.

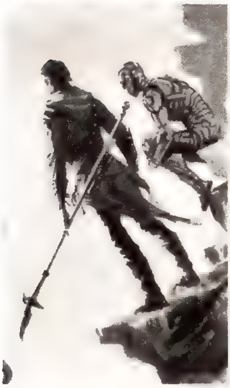
I chose one mountain to place in the background as a symbol for all Zelazny's mountains. The shapes of Mt. Fuji, Amber's Kolvir (inspired by the Sangre de Cristo mountains visible from Zelazny's home in Sante Fe), Saint Stephen's Range (from "This Moment of the Storm"), and "The Gray Sister" (the 40-mile-high peak that reached above the atmosphere in "This Mortal Mountain") are at such odds with one another that there's no way to make one stand for all, so I didn't try. I was conscious of the title of the third volume being *This Mortal Mountain,* and it was my hope the mountain would fall on the spine of the jacket on that volume.

THE FOUR FIGURES



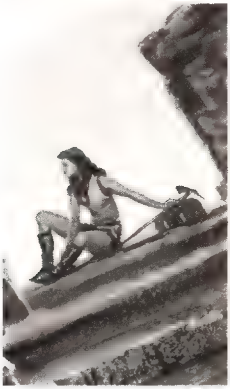
The **balding man** wearing a brown shirt with an X-like pattern is meant to suggest Roger Zelazny. His head is simply too small on the 15" by 30" painting to do a real portrait of him. I wish I had done the painting larger.

The red cord wrapped around his left wrist is the Thread worn by the title character in "Kalifriki of the Thread." He is holding the egg-shaped mechanical device that replaced Victor Corgo's heart in "The Furies."



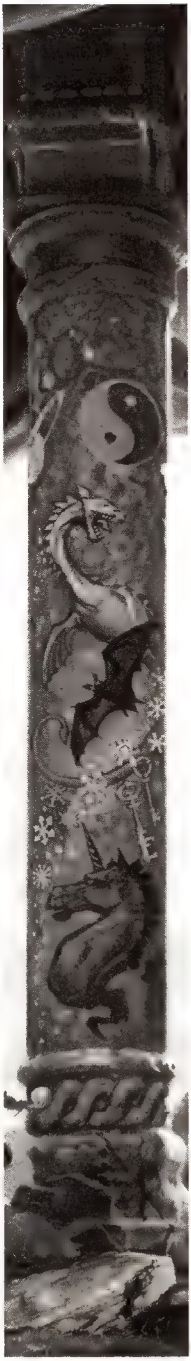
The **figure in leathers**, wearing a sword and carrying a spear/pike, is a stand-in for all of Zelazny's heroic characters, including Corwin, Dilvish, Lancelot and Shadowjack. The spear itself is a design element used only for its shape, a line to run counter to the tilt of the columns.

The **figure made of metal** was originally to be Roger himself, hanging out with Corwin of Amber or Shadowjack. But after trying, I just couldn't do an acceptably recognizable portrait of a person when the head is ¼" tall. So the figure became a robot. After all, robots, cyborgs and intelligent machines figure in many Zelazny stories. There are robots in "For A Breath I Tarry"—though none that seem to be humanoid in shape. Still, Frost desires to become human, so…



The **woman with red/brown hair**, wearing shorts, hiking boots and a travel sack is obviously Mari from "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai."

COLUMN 1



Saturn and Some of Its Moons
The last line of "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" is "No one is born a baitman, I don't think, but the rings of Saturn sing epithalamium the sea-beast's dower."

It can also be viewed as an astronomical reference, a planetary theme. [Volume 5 contains two stories specifically about Saturn: "Dreadsong" (partly science fact) and "The Bands of Titan." –EDS.]

Yin/Yang
A symbol of the influence of eastern philosophy and martial arts in Roger's writing. Roger was a trained martial artist, and he was fascinated by Japanese culture. [It was also used as a metaphor for the motivations of Mari and her enemies in "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai," for the two roles of "doctor" and "death" in "Godson," and it is also specifically evoked in the early tale, "The Year of the Good Seed." –EDS.]

Sea Monster
This is "Ikky", the Ichthyform Leviosaurus Levianthus from "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth."

Bat
"Damnation Alley" has large bats and large swarms of bats. *...And Call Me Conrad* has caves of spiderbats. Bats and vampires figure in a dozen other stories.

Pair of Keys
A metaphorical reference to "The Keys to December."

Snowflakes
I was thinking quite a bit about Frost in "For a Breath I Tarry," the line "aware of every snowflake that fell." Cold and snow also figure in two stories from the same period: "This Mortal Mountain" and "The Keys to December."

Black Unicorn
"Unicorn Variation" features a black unicorn.

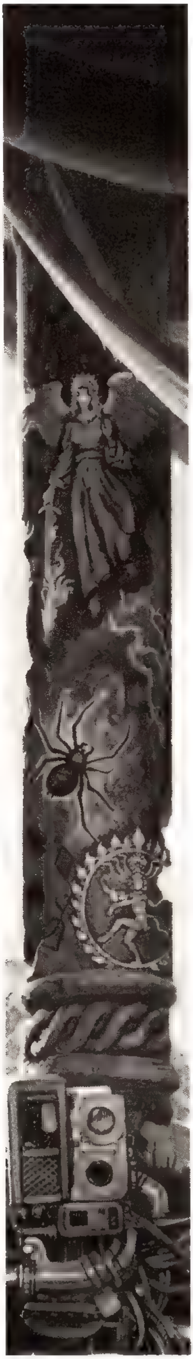
COLUMN 2

Angel with Flaming Sword and Lightning Bolts
This is the female angel-defender from “This Mortal Mountain” who shoots lighting at the protagonists.

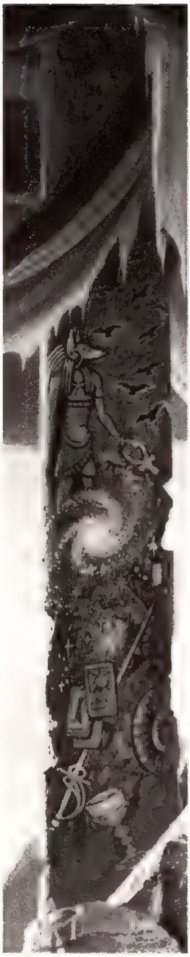
Big Spider
Hell Tanner runs into a giant spider in “Damnation Alley.” And swarms of mechanical spiders threaten Frost in “For a Breath I Tarry."

Club/Diamond/Spade/Heart
I was thinking of Amber’s Trumps, and the various stories in which cards appear.

Kali, Four-armed Hindu Goddess
Kali is a major character in *Lord of Light*, an excerpt of which is included in volume 2: “Death and the Executioner.”



COLUMN 3



Six-limbed figure (above the loop of drape)
This is an illusion. It is just a texture.

Anubis
Anubis is a major character in the novel *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, an excerpt of which is included in volume 3: "The Steel General."

Flock of Black Birds
These are the *Nine Black Doves.*

Spiral Galaxy
In "The Furies," Sandor, Benedick, and Lynx chase Victor Corgo all over the galaxy; "The Keys to December" talks about populating the galaxy; and the first line of "Come Back to the Killing Ground Alice, My Love" is "All the death-traps in the galaxy, and she has to walk into mine."

Indistinct Figure Above the Tarot Cards
I wish it were (as someone suggested after the painting was done) an invisible Faioli from "The Man Who Loved the Faioli," but alas, it is just an accidental texture.

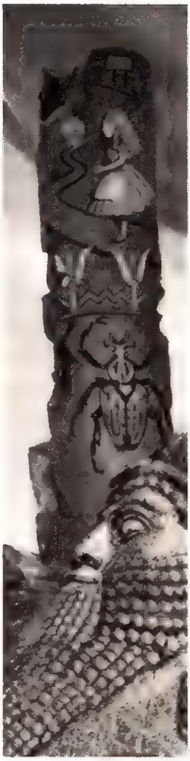
Tarot Cards
Zelazny collected Tarot cards and their shadows appeared in Amber as the Trumps used for communication and travel.

Épée
A sword as a symbol—nobody's specific blade. I was thinking more of the fighting in "Night Kings" than of Corwin's blade. Swordplay figured in many of Zelazny's stories.

Fossil Ammonite
A symbol I use for extinction or the incomprehensibility of time.

Chalice
This is The Holy Grail from "The Last Defender of Camelot" and the Tristram/Isolde myth's chalice with red wine (and the Dali pin featuring it) in "He Who Shapes."

COLUMN 4



Road & Road Sign
A punning reference to *Last Exit to Babylon*. The sign was too small to fit the word "Babylon" on it, so I can understand why that might not be obvious, which is just as well, because it can double as a reference to *The Road to Amber.*

More Road
"Damnation Alley" and *Roadmarks* involve road travel. And this is a stronger reference to the volume 6 title, *The Road to Amber*.

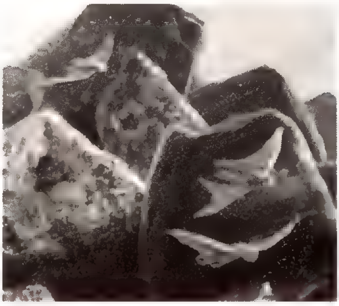
Alice in Wonderland
It's Alice, loosely based on the Tenniel illustrations. Zelazny's works include a lot of references to characters from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, including "Epithalamium," the second Amber series and the Amber short stories in volume 6.

Skull
A generalized death reference. Skulls also appear in "Come to the Killing Ground, Alice My Love" (the skulls from the Alice clones and the showdown at the "Place of Facing Skulls") and in "The Man Who Loved the Faoli" (a field of skulls and bones). Jack from *Jack of Shadows* and and Osiris from *Creatures of Light and Darkness* each keep the skull of an enemy at hand.

Scarab
Another Egyptian reference.

Assyrian Stone Carving
The Assyrian Balawat Gates have carvings like this, here adding another ancient, mythic element to the atmosphere of the painting.

ALONG THE GROUND



Lower Left Corner

The small green flying creatures appear in the Dilvish story "Tower of Ice." I wanted to break up the ground color with something and I thought of these critters… They could also work as some of the creatures mentioned offhand in "This Moment of the Storm."

Automobile Wreck

Auto wrecks seem to be a major theme of Zelazny's stories. They show up in many stories: "Passion Play," "Devil Car," "The Last of the Wild Ones," "Auto-Da-Fe," "He Who Shapes," and the wreck that placed Corwin in the hospital at the very beginning of *Nine Princes in Amber.*

Tombstones

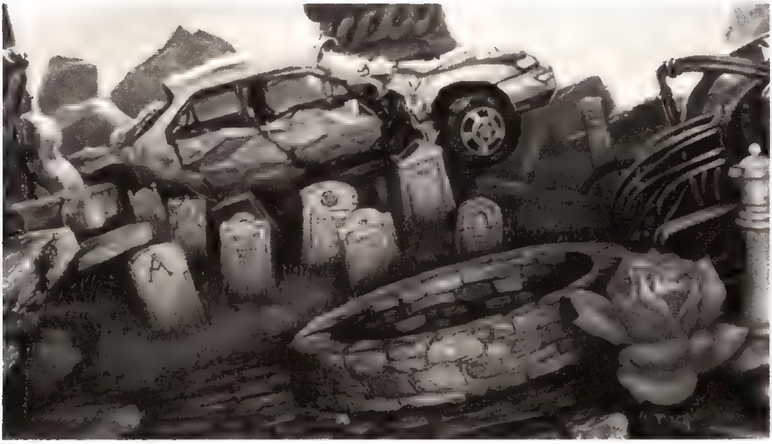
A metaphorical reference to "The Graveyard Heart," though there are graveyards in other Zelazny stories such as "Walpurgisnacht". The "Alpha" and "Omega" on two of the stones don't refer to a specific story.

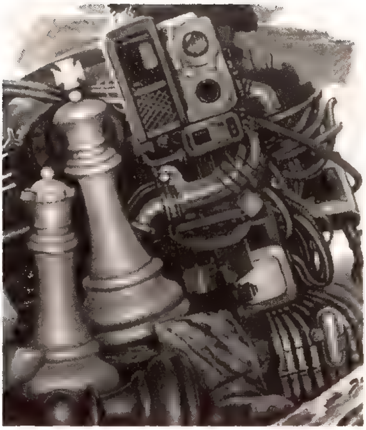
Cistern

This is the well from "Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love."

Large Red Rose

Though roses show up in several places in Zelazny's works, this is the first one in Zelazny's stories, the rose that played a major role in "A Rose for Ecclesiastes."





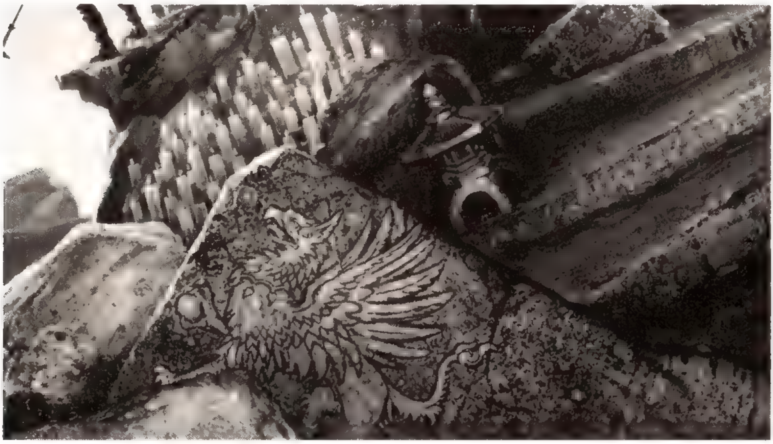
Machinery
A rather indistinct reference to *Power & Light*...there being power in the energy of technology, and light in the lighted buttons and screen. At the same time, I did have a background sense of the tech and machines in "For a Breath I Tarry" and at the top of The Gray Sister in "This Mortal Mountain." It also represents the "tech" part of Zelazny's habit of pitting magic against technology.

Chess pieces
Chess is the center of the action in "Unicorn Variation" and is a way for Death and his godson to communicate in "Godson."

Many Lit Candles
Death's cave in "Godson" contains a lit candle for every living human on Earth.

Small Pagoda on the Stairs
The pagoda in "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai" or any of the many references to eastern philosophy found in Roger's work.

Griffin
I thought of the Griffin when reading "Unicorn Variation," but it seemed a good generalized reference to the creatures of myth.



THE QUINTESSENTIAL ROGER ZELAZNY

Here is a sampling of what we and some others believe are Roger Zelazny's best works. These lists are opinions, but they may provide a basis for discussion or a starting point for new readers.

Roger Zelazny listed his own favorites in interviews (see "…And Call Me Roger" split among the six volumes of this collection). He said several times that his favorite *experimental* novel was *Creatures of Light and Darkness* and his favorite novelette was "For a Breath I Tarry" (in volume 2 of this collection). In two of his last interviews, he listed his five favorite books:

Lord of Light
This Immortal
Doorways in the Sand
Eye of Cat
A Night in the Lonesome October

Samuel R. Delany has written of his favorite Zelazny pieces and recently reiterated his opinions to one of the editors. He believes Zelazny's best works were all novellas, starting with ten early stories:

"A Rose for Ecclesiastes"
"The Graveyard Heart"
"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"
"He Who Shapes"
"The Furies"
"For a Breath I Tarry"

"This Moment of the Storm"
"The Keys to December"
"This Mortal Mountain"
"Damnation Alley"

He later added the three *My Name Is Legion* stories:

"The Eve of RUMOKO"
" 'Kjwalll'kje'k'koothaïlll'kje'k"
"Home Is the Hangman"

and a story written much later than the rest:

"24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"

Christopher S. Kovacs believes the interested reader should not miss these 20 short works:

"24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"
"Angel, Dark Angel"
"Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love"
"Comes Now the Power"
"Divine Madness"
"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"
"The Engine at Heartspring's Center"
"For a Breath I Tarry"
"The Furies"
"Godson"
"The Graveyard Heart"
"He Who Shapes"
"Home Is the Hangman"
"The Keys to December"
"The Last Defender of Camelot"
"The Man Who Loved the Faioli"
"This Moment of the Storm"
"Permafrost"
"A Rose for Ecclesiastes"
"Unicorn Variation"

these 10 novels:

Creatures of Light and Darkness
Doorways in the Sand
Eye of Cat
Isle of the Dead

Jack of Shadows
Lord of Light
A Night in the Lonesome October
Nine Princes in Amber
This Immortal
Today We Choose Faces

and these 5 collaborations:

Coils (with Fred Saberhagen)
"Come to Me Not in Winter's White" (with Harlan Ellison)
Deus Irae (with Philip K. Dick)
The Mask of Loki (with Thomas T. Thomas)
Wilderness (with Gerald Hausman)

David G. Grubbs was impressed by these novels, some on the initial reading, some after finding the way to appreciation:

Coils (with Fred Saberhagen)
Creatures of Light and Darkness
Donnerjack (with Jane Lindskold)
Doorways in the Sand
Jack of Shadows
Lord Demon (with Jane Lindskold)
Lord of Light
The Mask of Loki (with Thomas T. Thomas)
A Night in the Lonesome October
Nine Princes in Amber
Roadmarks
This Immortal / ...And Call Me Conrad (both versions)

He wishes to add these to Samuel Delany's excellent list of 14:

"Angel, Dark Angel"
"Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love"
"Godson"
"Kalifriki of the Thread"
"Permafrost"
"Shadowjack"

and he also found these works to be entertaining:

All the Dilvish, the Damned stories (incl. *The Changing Land*)
All the Sleeper stories from the Wildcards series
Amber (the novels and the newest short stories in volume 6)

Changeling & *Madwand*
"Circe Has Her Problems"
"Collector's Fever"
"Come to Me Not in Winter's White" (with Harlan Ellison)
"Devil Car"
"The Engine at Heartspring's Center"
"The George Business"
"Here There Be Dragons"
"Itself Surprised"
"The Last Defender of Camelot"
"The Last of the Wild Ones"
"Lucifer"
"Mana from Heaven"
"Way Up High"

Ann Crimmins says: First, I urge everyone to read all of the poetry in these six volumes. Zelazny's poems are amusing, challenging, thought-provoking, clear, obscure, and more personal the most of his prose. The poems reintroduced me to an author I thought I knew, adding a dimension to my understanding.

Novels:

Coils (with Fred Saberhagen)
Creatures of Light and Darkness
Deus Irae (with Philip K. Dick)
Eye of Cat
Lord of Light
A Night in the Lonesome October

Shorter Works:

"24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"
"Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love"
"Come to Me Not in Winter's White" (with Harlan Ellison)
"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"
"For a Breath I Tarry"
"The Graveyard Heart"
"He Who Shapes"
"The Keys to December"
"Permafrost"
"A Rose for Ecclesiastes"
"This Mortal Mountain"
"Walpurgisnacht"

ISLE OF REGRET

by Trent Zelazny

Amberzine #12-15, March 2005.

Sometimes I wake up from dreams in which my father has played a role. For a few seconds I truly believe he is alive, or has returned. More times than I can count I've woken up just after hugging him, and no matter how many times this happens, once my conscious mind takes over and reveals the painful truth, the emptiness I feel inside is immeasurable.

I have accepted my father's death, though I have never gotten over it. Maybe one reason I've had so much trouble is that his books are everywhere. Right now I can just turn to the shelf behind me and find no less than fifty paperbacks with his name on them. I am a huge fan of his work, my friends are fans of his work—people read my last name, and sometimes they ask me if I'm related to the writer. These kinds of things might possibly stagger the process, I don't know. It could also be a number of regrets I have. Regrets about how I dealt with things when he was sick—how the whole family did, maybe. I do have to chalk at least some of it up to that I was a somewhat dysfunctional, self-absorbed teenager. I wasn't there for him—or Jane—like I should have been. With all of my other problems at the time (now pointless by comparison) I was in heavy denial. I did not believe that my father was going to die. Or I really did not want to believe it.

With the exception of a couple of pieces, I did not read my father's work while he was alive. Within a month after his death, I picked up *Nine Princes in Amber,* hoping that, in some way, it might help me hold on to him. To an extent I was successful, but moreso, the book just blew me away. I immediately read *The Guns of Avalon*, then *Sign of the Unicorn*, and so on, and began to fantasize about living in Amber, training with Benedict or riding with Julian through the forests of Arden. I became obsessed with the series (hell, my son's name is Corwin Random), and then eventually moved on to his other books. I have a special fondness for "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," *The Dream Master*, and *My Name Is Legion. Lonesome October* is up there too. I found a love for his writing, as well as a newfound love for the man. I regret not reading his work while he was around. I regret never being able to toss one of his books down in front of him and say, "This rocks." I regret that I never got to tell him how proud I am of him.

But to hell with regret. He lived through it. I lived through it. And years later, even though I wasn't actually reading his work, we were able to talk about creativity, specifically music and writing. It was great. The man seemed to know everything, or at least something about anything. As we had these almost nightly conversations, me sitting on a stool, him lying on the couch, I grew to understand how great and important he was; and once I had read his books and stories—him being my father aside—he became one of the biggest influences on my own work. I have many influences, but when people ask me who the biggest are, I typically list three: Donald Westlake, Joe Lansdale, and Roger Zelazny.

I touched upon this in another piece I just wrote, as yet unpublished, but I think it is important to share again. When we are kids, our parents are the most important people in the whole world. They are our providers. They take care of us. In a sense, they are gods. However, at some point, when we enter into our all-important teenage years, some inane part of us comes to this bizarre understanding that our parents are not cool. They become, in a sense, dorks. I don't know why this is, do you? If you did not have this view as a teenager, you are a very special, rare breed. Most every kid I know did this.

Fortunately for me, even if I had this outlook, my father and I still had a connection. A connection of creativity (that and, somewhere inside, I did actually know that he was totally cool). We talked more and more about life and what it meant. We talked about anything, really. When I got into the Beatles and the Monkees and Led Zeppelin, he already knew all about them. We philosophized, joked around, and drank too much Pepsi. He read me bits from the musical he wrote, read me excerpts from *A Night in the Lonesome October* while it was still scribbled on legal pads.

When he passed away and I began truly experiencing his work, I got in touch with him like I never had before. It was clearly Roger, but it was a Roger like I'd never seen. It was a Roger that not only knew about all the wonders, but had created a lot of them himself. It was so totally cool.

As time goes by, I've learned that, at least in my life, things often come full circle, because my father is still the most important person to me in the world. He is my hero, and I miss him dearly.

I still have the dreams. I often ask myself if it is just a dream, or is he dropping in to say hello. I guess, really, it doesn't matter. I get to see him every now and then, and from time to time we're back on the stool and the couch, chatting it up.

I'm pleased that the work he created has influenced so many other writers and has entertained so many people. I sometimes wonder, if I had been truly aware of how cool and important he was when I was a self-centered doofus teenager, would things have been different?

I regret to say I'll never know…

But to hell with regret.

Roger, here's to you, man.

Cheers.

IN MEMORIAM: ROGER ZELAZNY, THE LORD OF LIGHT

by George R. R. Martin

He was a poet, first, last, always. His words sang.

He was a storyteller without peer. He created worlds as colorful and exotic and memorable as any our genre has ever seen.

But most of all, I will remember his people. Corwin of Amber and his troublesome siblings. Charles Render, the dream master. The Sleeper, Croyd Crenson, who never learned algebra. Fred Cassidy climbing on his rooftops. Conrad. Dilvish the Damned. Francis Sandow. Billy Blackhorse Singer. Jarry Dark. The Jack of Shadows. Hell Tanner. Snuff.

And Sam. Him especially. "His followers called him Mahasamatman and said he was a god. He preferred to drop the Maha- and the -atman, however, and called himself Sam. He never claimed to be a god. But then, he never claimed not to be a god."

Lord of Light was the first Zelazny book I ever read. I was in college at the time, a longtime reader who dreamed of writing himself one day. I'd been weaned on Andre Norton, cut my teeth on Heinlein juveniles, survived high school with the help of H. P. Lovecraft, Isaac Asimov, "Doc" Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, and J. R. R. Tolkien. I read Ace doubles and belonged to the Science Fiction Book Club, but I had not yet found the magazines. I'd never heard of this Zelazny guy. But when I read those words for the first time, a chill went through me, and I sensed that SF would never be the same. Nor was it. Like only a few before him, Roger left his mark on the genre.

He left his mark on my life as well. After *Lord of Light*, I read every word of his I could get my hands on. "He Who Shapes," *...And Call Me Conrad*, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," *Isle of the Dead*, "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, and all the rest. I knew I had found one hell of a writer in this fellow with the odd, unforgettable name. I never dreamed that, years later, I would also find in Roger one hell of a friend.

I met Roger several times in the mid-'70s; at a writers' workshop in Bloomington, Indiana, at cons in Wichita and El Paso, at Nebula banquets. By then, I had made a few sales on my own. I was surprised and thrilled when Roger knew my work. He was at first blush a shy man, always kind, often funny, but quiet. I cannot say I knew him well...not until the end of 1979, when I moved to Santa Fe, fresh from a divorce, near broke, and utterly alone.

Roger was the only person I knew in town, and him not that well. We were colleagues and con acquaintances, no more, but from the way he treated me, you would have thought we had been the closest of friends for years. He saw me through the worst months. We shared dinners and breakfasts and endless shoptalk. He drove me to Albuquerque for the monthly First Friday writers' lunch. When a local bookstore asked him to do a signing, he made sure that I was invited as well. He took me with him to parties and wine tastings, even asked me to share Thanksgiving and Christmas with his family. If I had to fly to a con, he drove across town to pick up my mail and water my plant. And when my money was running low at the end of my first year in Santa Fe, he offered me a loan to tide me over until I could finish *Fevre Dream*.

It wasn't just me. He did as much, and more, for others. Roger was as kind and generous as any man I have ever known. He was the best kind of company, often quiet, but always interesting. Sometimes it seemed he had read every book ever printed. He knew something about everything and everything about some things, but he never used his knowledge to impress or intimidate. In an age when everyone is a specialist, Roger was the last Renaissance Man, fascinated by the world and all that's in it, capable of talking about Doc Savage and Proust with equal expertise and enthusiasm.

Those who saw him only from a distance sometimes came away with the impression that Roger was serious, grave, dignified, never dreaming how funny the man could be. No one who heard the Chicken Effect Speech at Bubonicon will ever forget it. Wild Cards fans still grin at the memory of Croyd and the decomposing alien. During the last year of Roger's life, Jane Lindskold introduced him to role-playing, and he took to it with the glee of a small boy, mischievous and ever inventive. I will always cherish those people too, although only a few of us were fortunate enough to meet them. His Chinese poet warrior, declaiming thunderingly bad poems as he walked down an endless muddy road. His spaceship chaplain solemnly explaining evolution and ethics to an increasingly confused alien. And Oklahoma Crude, roughneck oilman, chewing tobacco and swapping jokes with space pirates and musketeers alike.

A few months ago, when Howard Waldrop was passing through Santa Fe, I threw a party. Howard wound up sitting on the floor, while Roger read a musical comedy he'd just written, about Death and his godson. Roger sang all the parts, sort of chanting them, a little off-key maybe…well, okay, maybe more than a little. One by one the other guests interrupted their conversations and drifted over to hear him read and sing, until the whole party gathered around Roger's feet. By the end, there was a smile on every face.

He was fighting Death himself then, though only Jane knew it. And that was very like Roger too, to keep his pains private, to take fear and shape it into art, to transform illness and death into a song, a story, and a roomful of smiles.

"But look around you…" he wrote in *Lord of Light*. "Death and Light are everywhere, always, and they begin, end, strive, attend, into and upon the Dream of the Nameless that is the world, burning words within Samsara, perhaps to create a thing of beauty."

—George R. R. Martin
Eulogy delivered at Roger
Zelazny's wake, June 1995.

THANK YOU

By all accounts, Roger Zelazny was a helluva guy. His poetic style, his wide range of interests, and his desire not to repeat himself made him a writer to watch throughout his entire career. He was a witty, learned, and gracious man, who, as Robert Silverberg told us in his introduction to volume 1, drew no unkind words from others and had none to offer. His death at an early age was a tragedy.

It has been a great pleasure and a journey of three years to collect, write, edit and typeset the 3472 pages collected in these six volumes. It was an effort driven by our enjoyment of Roger Zelazny as a writer and as a man.

Thank you for following along with us. We hope it brought you as much reading pleasure as it brought us satisfaction in producing it.

NOTE ON CONTENTS

This six volume collection includes all of Zelazny's known *short fiction and poetry*. The single short story we have heard of but couldn't find is "Checkup," written for the UNICEF News in 1975. We included one serialized novel (*…And Call Me Conrad*) and two novel excerpts ("The Steel General" from *Creatures of Light and Darkness* and "Death and the Executioner" from *Lord of Light*). Other chapters of novels have also appeared separately, but we did not include them. We also did not include a half-dozen poems from collaborative novels, and we made no attempt to include all of Zelazny's non-fiction or interviews (some of which have titles that have been mistaken for story titles).

See the Zelazny bibliography, *The Ides of Octember*, produced by Christopher S. Kovacs for a complete list of all Zelazny publications.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Frontispiece portrait by Jack Gaughan first appeared on the cover of "Marcon VII Program and Schedule Book, 1972" where Roger Zelazny was Guest of Honor.

"Roger Zelazny" *by Jane Lindskold* first appears in this volume.

"Remembering Roger" *by Gerald Hausman* first appears in this volume.

"The Trickster" *by Gardner Dozois* first appears in this volume.

"Godson" first appeared in *Black Thorn, White Rose*, eds. Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, Eos 1994.

"Godson: A Play in Three Acts" first appears in this volume (written in 1994–95).

"Come Back to the Killing Ground, Alice, My Love" first appeared in *Amazing Stories*, August 1992.

"Prince of the Powers of This World" first appeared in *Christmas Forever*, ed. David G. Hartwell, Tor 1993.

"The Long Crawl of Hugh Glass" first appeared as part of the novel *Wilderness* by Zelazny and Gerald Hausman, Forge 1994; it first appeared separately in *Superheroes*, eds. John Varley and Ricia Mainhardt, Ace 1995. Previously uncollected in this form.

"Tunnel Vision" first appeared in *Galaxy #3* May/June 1994. Previously uncollected.

"Epithalamium" first appeared in *Fantastic Alice*, ed. Margaret Weis and Martin H. Greenberg, Ace 1995.

"Forever After: Preludes and Postlude" first appeared in *Forever After*, ed. Roger Zelazny, Baen 1995. Previously uncollected.

"Lady of Steel" first appeared in *Chicks in Chainmail*, ed. Esther Friesner, Baen 1995.

"The Three Descents of Jeremy Baker" first appeared in *VB Tech Journal* Vol 1 No 5 June 1995. Previously uncollected.

"The Sleeper: Character Outline" first appears in this volume (written late 1980s or early 1990s).

"Concerto for Siren and Serotonin" first appeared in *Wild Cards V: Down and Dirty*, ed. George R. R. Martin, Bantam/Spectra 1988. Previously uncollected.

"The Long Sleep" first appeared in *Wild Cards XIII: Card Sharks*, ed. George R. R. Martin, Baen Books 1993. Previously uncollected.

"Amber Map" by Elizabeth Danforth first appeared in *Hellride #1*, 1972, ed. Ken St. Andre. The current, updated version first appears in this volume.

"Prolog to *Trumps of Doom*" first appeared in *Trumps of Doom*, Underwood-Miller edition [as "Prolog"] 1985.

"The Road to Amber" first appeared in *Nine Princes in Amber Book 1 of 3*, DC Comics 1996. Previously uncollected.

"The Great Amber Questionnaire" first appeared in a modified form in *Hellride* #3, January 28, 1978. Previously uncollected.

"A Secret of Amber" by Roger Zelazny and Ed Greenwood first appeared in *Amberzine #12–15*, March 2005. (written 1977–1992). Previously uncollected.

"The Salesman's Tale" first appeared in *Amberzine #6*, February 1994.

"Blue Horse, Dancing Mountains" first appeared in *Wheel of Fortune*, eds. Roger Zelazny and Martin H. Greenberg, AvoNova 1995.

"The Shroudling and the Guisel" first appeared in *Realms of Fantasy* Vol 1 No 1, October 1994.

"Coming to a Cord" first appeared in *Pirate Writings* Vol 3 No 2, June 1995.

"Hall of Mirrors" first appeared in *Castle Fantastic*, ed. John DeChancie, DAW 1996.

"On Writing Horror After Reading Clive Barker" first appeared in *The Stephen King Companion: Grimoire*, ed. George Beahm, GB Publishing, 1990. Previously uncollected.

"'When It Comes It's Wonderful': Art versus Craft in Writing" first appeared in *Deep Thoughts: Proceedings of Life, The Universe and Everything XII, February 16–19, 1994*, eds. Steve Setzer and Marny K. Parkin, LTU&E 1995. Previously uncollected.

"Warriors and Dreams" first appeared in *Warriors of Blood and Dream*, AvoNova 1995 (as "Introduction"). Previously uncollected.

"'...And Call Me Roger': The Literary Life of Roger Zelazny, Part 6" by Christopher S. Kovacs, MD first appears in this volume.

"Sandow's Shadow (Outline)" first appears in this volume (written in the early 1990s).

"Shadowland (Outline)" first appears in this volume (first draft written circa 1979; revised 1993).

"Dysonized Biologicals (Outline)" first appears in this volume (written circa 1993).

"Donnerjack, of Virtù: A Fable for the Machine Age (Outline)" first appears in this volume (written September 1991).

"Z-World" *by Michael Whelan* first appears in this volume.

"Isle of Regret" *by Trent Zelazny* first appeared in *Amberzine* #12-15, March 2005.

"In Memoriam: Roger Zelazny, The Lord of Light" *by George R. R. Martin* was a Eulogy delivered at Roger Zelazny's wake in June 1995. It was reprinted (edited slightly) in *Locus* #415, August 1995, and again in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, March 1996.

Poems

"Our Own Piece of the Sky" first appears in this volume. Written in 1994 as a coda to *Psychoshop*, by Alfred Bester and Roger Zelazny, but not used.

"The Appetite and Rising Sun", "Cry of the Needy", and "The Rational Gods" first appear in this volume. Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky.*

"Storm", "Spinning the Day Through My Head", "The God and Frustrate Shrine" first appeared in *To Spin Is Miracle Cat*, Underwood-Miller 1981. Written 1955–60 for *Chisel in the Sky.*

"Walking, of Course" first appeared as a coda to the collaborative novel *Wilderness* by Roger Zelazny and Gerald Hausman, Tor/Forge 1994. It was published separately in *New Mexico Poetry Renaissance*, eds. Sharon Niederman and Miriam Sagan, Red Crane Books 1994.

"Paranoid Game" first appeared in *Alternities #6*, Summer 1981.

"Ikhnaton's Hymn to the Sun" first appeared in its current form in *Hymn to the Sun: An Imitation*, DNA Publications 1996. Extracts appeared in *Flare*, by Roger Zelazny and Thomas T. Thomas, Baen 1992.

"Spring Morning: Missive" first appeared in *To Spin Is Miracle Cat*, Underwood-Miller 1981.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks go in many directions: to Roger Zelazny for his life's work, a body of writing that made this project a joy to work on; to my wife, Leah Anderson, without whose support this project would never have started; to Chris Kovacs, whose research efforts not only produced a comprehensive collection of material, but whose insights added depth to the whole project; to Ann Crimmins for her dedication to all things grammatical; to Kirby McCauley, who promoted the project and arranged for us the right to print Zelazny's writing; to Jane Lindskold, Gerald Hausman, and Gardner Dozois for their heartfelt introductions; to Michael Whelan for his spectacular dust jacket painting and his illuminating essay; to Ed Greenwood for his multi-year collaboration with Roger Zelazny; to Elizabeth Danforth for her Amber map; to George R. R. Martin and Trent Zelazny for their touching memoria; and to Alice Lewis for her polished dust jacket design, her clever layouts for the Timeline and Whelan essay, and her invaluable advice in design issues. Thanks also go to: Mark Olson for his help in book production, Geri Sullivan for design advice and our stalwart band of proofreaders:

Rick Katze, Tim Szczesuil, Ann Broomhead, Larry Pfeffer,
Peter Olson, Larry Setlow, Alice Lewis, Sharon Sbarsky,
Ann Crimmins, Chris Kovacs, and Mark Olson.

David G. Grubbs
October, 2009

In order to write the "A Word from Zelazny" sections, the annotations, and the literary biography, I relied on many individuals. Some aided in the extensive search to locate original manuscripts, correspondence, rare fanzines, and obscure interviews. Colleagues, family, and friends of Roger Zelazny helped to clarify details and quash rumors about his life and work. My own colleagues helped with translations of Greek, German, Japanese and other foreign language phrases. Apologies to anyone who might have been overlooked in compiling the following list:

Charles Ardai, John Ayotte, George Beahm, Greg Bear, John Betancourt, Paul Bradford, Rick Bradford, Ned Brooks, Lois McMaster Bujold, John Callender, George Carayanniotis, Ung-il Chung, Michael Citrak, Giovanna Clairval, Bob Collins, Lloyd Currey, Jack Dann, Chris DeVito, Jane Frank, c Shell Franklin, Paul Gilster, Dave Goldman, Simon Gosden, Ed Greenwood, Joe Haldeman, David Hartwell, Gerald Hausman, Graham Holroyd, Patrick Hulman, Tom Jackson, Beate Lanske, Elizabeth LaVelle, Jane Lindskold, George R. R. Martin, Bryan McKinney, Henry Morrison, Kari Mozena, Rias Nuninga, Richard Patt, Greg Pickersgill, Bob Pylant, Mike Resnick, Andy Richards, Fred Saberhagen, Roger Schlobin, Dean Schramm, Darrell Schweitzer, Robert Silverberg, Dan Simmons, Dean Wesley Smith, Ken St. Andre, Richard Stegall, Thomas T. Thomas, Norris Thomlinson, Josh Wanisko, Erick Wujcik, Carl Yoke, Trent Zelazny, Cindy Ziesing, and Scott Zrubek.

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Roger Zelazny Papers, Special Collections
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And then there are the personal thanks that I need to make. Of course none of this would have been possible without Roger Zelazny creating the very stories and characters that I find myself returning to again and again. When I finally met him at Ad Astra in 1986, I interrupted his rapid departure from the convention and asked "Mr. Zelazny" to sign the books I'd carried with me. He kindly took care of that and the requests of my companions. "Everybody OK, then? Right, gotta get to the airport"—and then his parting comment to me was "…and call me Roger." From that memory came the fitting title for the monograph in these volumes.

My mother handed me that paperback *Nine Princes in Amber* one dull day so long ago when I complained that I had nothing to read, and my parents drove me to countless new and used bookstores on the very first Zelazny quest to find copies of all of his books. The Internet makes searches so much easier now, and I couldn't have gathered much of this material if I'd had to rely on physical searches and postal mail. My buddy Ed Hew and his cousins drove me to Ad Astra for that fateful meeting. Dave Grubbs believed in and fought to see this project succeed when my involvement made it expand well beyond what he'd anticipated, and Ann Crimmins pruned, weeded, and used a flamethrower where necessary to turn my sometimes passive prose into something more readable. And none of this would have been possible without the support of my wife, Susan, and our children Caileigh and Jamieson, who put up with my additional absences from home and the other blocks of time consumed in creating this project. If their eyes should roll at mention of the name Zelazny, you may now understand why. And the fact that Susan's birthday is also May 13, or that my last name also refers to what happens in a smithy, are just examples of those Strange and Odd Coincidences in Life realized while researching this project. That one of our beloved Golden Retrievers was named Amber is *not* one of those coincidences.

Christopher S. Kovacs, MD
October, 2009 (updated September, 2013)

I wish to thank my daughters Fiona and Deirdre, whom I dragged to cons as children and who have grown to love sf and fantasy as much as I do. Particular thanks to my husband Peter Havriluk for patience, encouragement, and easing the log jam at the p.c. by buying himself a laptop. Thanks to Elizabeth Zaborskis Fernandez, for help with the Spanish. Dave and Chris, I'm delighted to have worked with you. Thanks also to the various Crimmins/Havriluk cats who warmed my lap as I edited.

Ann Crimmins
October, 2009

TECHNICAL NOTES

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THE COLLECTED
STORIES OF
ROGER
ZELAZNY

THE ROAD
TO AMBER

NESFA
PRESS

PHOTOGRAPH © BETH GWINN

ROGER ZELAZNY (1937–1995) was an award-winning science fiction writer who, during his last five years, regretted only that he lacked the time to craft the short fiction that his fans especially loved.

During the interval covered by this volume, Zelazny completed Alfred Bester's *Psychoshop*, collaborated on other novels, and extended the Amber series. He was particularly keen about his Nebula-nominated *A Night in the Lonesome October*, "Godson" and its adaptation into a play, and two projects later completed by Jane Lindskold: the *Donnerjack* trilogy and *Lord Demon.* Zelazny died in 1995, after a year-long bout with inoperable cancer.

Zelazny is best known for his novellas such as "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," "He Who Shapes," "Home Is the Hangman," and "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai" and for novels, including *Lord of Light, This Immortal, Jack of Shadows*, and the 10-volume Amber series started by *Nine Princes in Amber.* He garnered six Hugo Awards for novels and short fiction and three Nebulas for short fiction.

PHOTOGRAPH © MICHAEL WHELAN

MICHAEL WHELAN is one of the world's premier science fiction and fantasy artists. His spectacular work has covered more than 350 books and more recently graces the halls of fine art galleries. With these volumes, he has finally fulfilled Zelazny's longstanding wish for a genuine Michael Whelan cover.

After a brief stint as a medical illustrator, Whelan turned to fantastic art and burst onto the SF scene at the 1974 World Science Fiction Convention. Since then, his illustrations have adorned many Stephen King novels, most of Anne McCaffrey's Dragonriders of Pern series, Michael Moorcock's Elric series, many other best sellers, and several record albums.

Whelan has won scores of awards, including 15 Hugo Awards (13 for Best Professional Artist). He received his first Hugo in Boston at the 1980 Worldcon, Noreascon 2, and since then, he has won 26 Locus Awards (25 for Best Professional Artist).

"Roger Zelazny was one of SF's finest storytellers, a poet with an immense and instinctive gift for language. Reading Zelazny is like dropping into a Mozart string quartet as played by Thelonious Monk."

— GREG BEAR

Volume 6: The Road to Amber, the last in the series, covers the final five years of Zelazny's career in the early 1990s, when he reached for new ideas and continued familiar themes with stories such as "Godson" and "Godson: A Play in Three Acts," two more Wild Cards stories ("Concerto for Siren and Serotonin" and "The Long Sleep"), and a linked sequence of five Amber stories leading to planned but unwritten Amber novels.

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THE ROAD TO AMBER

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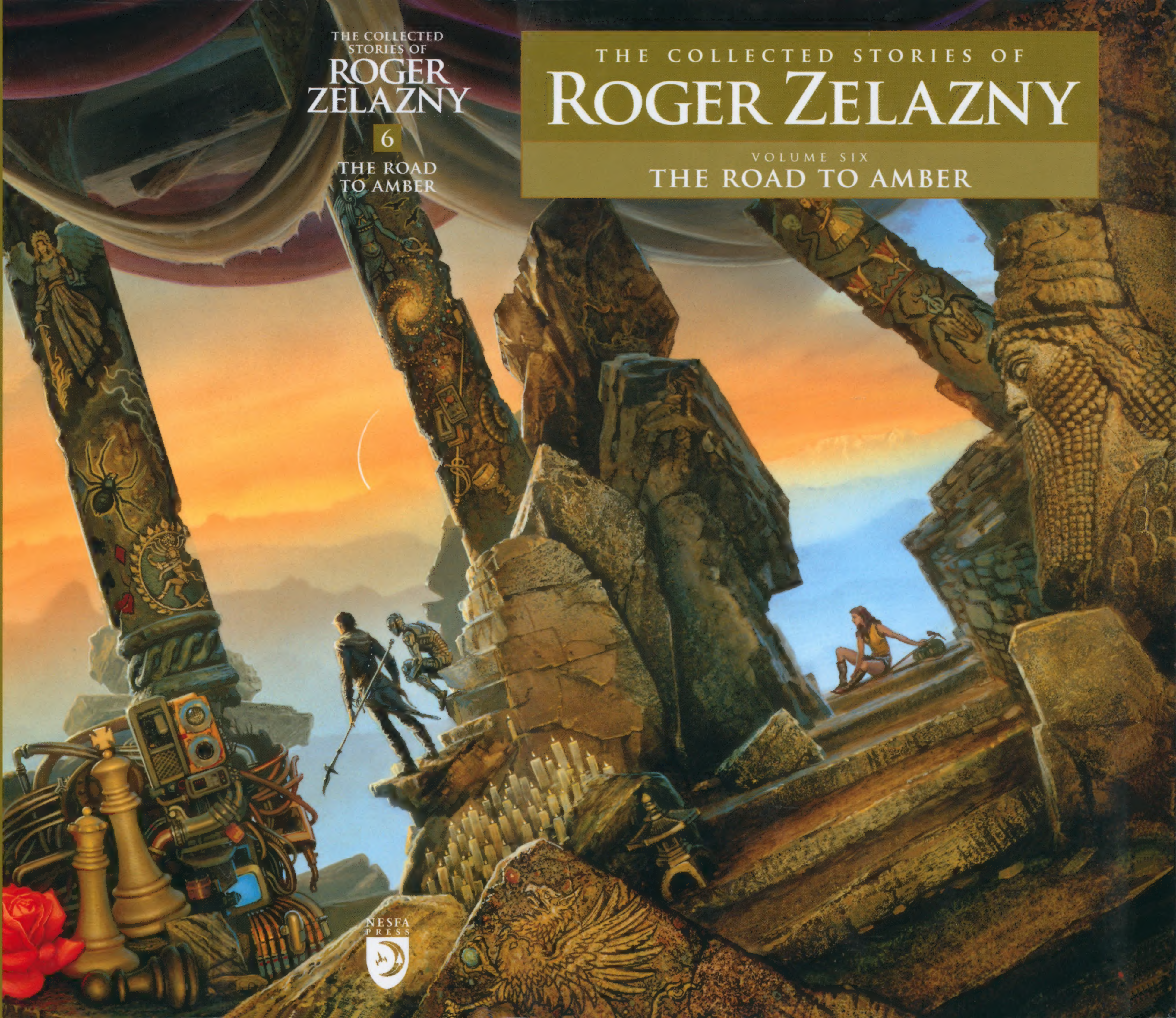

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